

Backstreets

The Boss Magazine

#81 WINTER 2005
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Springsteen gets back to his night job: November 6, 2004, at the Stone Pony.

Backstreets

THE BOSS MAGAZINE SINCE 1980

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October 2004 • Danny Clinch Photo

OFF THE WALL

MICHAEL STIPE & BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

October 2004 • Danny Clinch Photo

LETTERS

HONEST WITH ME

Dear Editor:

Loved your [online] review of the October 5 show at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. It was one of the best, most fun, most spontaneous, most exhilarating rock concerts I've ever been to. I feel very lucky to have been there. You were probably expecting it, but I had no idea Neil Young was going to show up. It seemed the whole show was just one delightful surprise after another. When we left, my brother looked at his watch and said, "That was a five-hour concert!" With the energy level, it felt more like two.

I just wanted to add a comment, that as an undecided voter, I was very pleasantly surprised at how positive and *not* mean-spirited the whole event was. I almost didn't go to the concert because I was afraid it might have a really nasty Bush-bashing atmosphere (ever seen Ani DiFranco on stage?). But instead, it was a totally positive, respectful, get-out-the-vote message that didn't bad-mouth anybody. Michael Stipe even said something like, "You don't have to vote like we do, but just make sure you vote."

This concert did more to win me over to the Kerry side than all the bitter, angry, Bush-hating comments I've heard from commentators and from (some) friends, family, and co-workers.

Paul Bard
Via e-mail

NEVER SAY GOODBYE

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading the last issue of *Backstreets*. I am quite surprised by the reaction of people to Bruce's political stand. I have been a concert-going fan since he started coming to Detroit back in the early '70s, and nothing has changed. The music, the stance, the fun—it is still the same Bruce. What has happened is that his fans have changed. We have aged, and so have our political beliefs.

I am a conservative, and although I do not agree with Bruce and his politics, I still find a positive message in his songs. A positive message for me, in

my interpretation. On the other hand, I firmly agree that he has the right to use his time and talents to forward his message. Just as I have a right to sit this tour out, or to go and show my support for the other side. I would be upset if he advertised the tour as a regular show and then turned it into a political rally. He did not do that; he was upfront—upfront just like he has *always* been for the last 30 years.

I do not agree with the message, but I support the messenger, and the right to give it.

Bob Ganzak
Valdosta, GA

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dear Editor:

I applaud Bruce Springsteen for taking a position on the Presidential election. I believe he has as much of a right and responsibility to voice his opinion as any other American. I've been a Springsteen fan since 1975, and have been fortunate enough to see over 75 shows over the years. But, today I speak not as a Springsteen fan, but as a U.S. Army veteran. Our country is headed down a path I've seen before. I was an Infantryman in Vietnam between 1968 and 1969. I have witnessed the horrors of war. I have taken the dead body of a friend off the field of battle. I was no hero, but I had the honor and privilege of serving with heroes. There is no reason to continue a war that was sold to the citizens with made-up evidence. Today over 1,025 brave young Americans have given their lives; enough is enough. Will it not stop until we have to build another Wall?

I will be in Cleveland and Orlando for the Vote for Change tour. I'll be the 57-year-old guy cheering for my favorite band—and the freedom so many young souls died to provide.

Bill Phillips
Glendora, CA

Company E, 4th Battalion, 31st
Infantry, 196th Infantry Brigade,
Americal Division; Chu Lai, South
Vietnam (June 1968 - June 1969)

TAKE ME AS I AM

Dear Editor:

I just received my copy of issue #80, and in reading the letters to the Editor, I wondered who these

supposed "fans" have thought Bruce was all these years! Who could have attended a show, heard or read an interview, or listened to his music and not determined he is politically liberal?

Personally, Bruce and I are at opposite ends of the political spectrum, but I don't look to him for leadership. I look to his music for enjoyment, inspiration, and consolation. I couldn't care less what his political views are, if he drinks too much, or cheats at poker. It is his music that has had a profound influence on my life.

When I listen to his music, I am standing with Janie down by the riverside, riding in the highway patrol car with Joe Roberts, or working at the carwash with Catherine LeFevre. I am the "little girlie with the blue jeans so tight" in "Cadillac Ranch," the girl for whom he'd "drive all night again, just to buy you some shoes," or the girl "with her hands on her hips and that smile on her lips" from "She's the One."

Bruce is a citizen of this country who has every right to espouse his views on anything from the contest for President to the winner of *American Idol*. Just because he has an avenue to a larger audience than most of us doesn't mean he can't say what he thinks. Remember, folks, this is America. I think he said it best in "Thunder Road": "Well, I'm no hero, that's understood."

To those of you who have decided to boycott Bruce or destroy your music collection: More power to you! That just means I have a better chance of getting good seats for his next tour.

Ms. Shawn J. Goss
Strafford, MO

PO' BOY

Dear Editor:

My two heroes in life are Bruce Springsteen and Elvis Presley, so I was thrilled and moved to read your feature connecting my two heroes. I commend you for an excellent job.

But what really ties them together, I think, is more of a similarity in their backgrounds, and as such, more of an emotional connection than your articles conveyed. Both were from relatively poor backgrounds, yet both dared to dream the big American

dream and had the ambition and talent to make those dreams real. Both had somber, authoritarian fathers and supportive and expansive mothers. Both have been uniquely tough and macho for rock stars, yet both conveyed a vulnerability that is atypical, especially for males in our society. Both have had the confidence to laugh at themselves, because both intrinsically knew that they were great. Both connected with black music and were able to be soulful with the best of them, but both understood their "whiteness" and never tried to simply mimic the black artists they loved like so many others.

I guess the thing about Bruce and Elvis that was so special to me was that both were real outsiders as kids, and even after both became loved by the world, neither lost that "outsider-ness." And even after both became rich, they carried a "poor boy" quality with every step that they'd take.

In the end, though, they're the King and the Boss because both have connected with audiences like no other performers before or since—and that's why they have not only huge audiences but cult-like loyal ones. Bruce and Elvis are like mirrors for those of us who love them; we see ourselves in them, good and bad. Who else can we say that about?

Love the magazine, keep up the great work. And congrats on the Bruce interview—hopefully it won't be your last!

Brett Wallach
Hatfield, PA

TANGLED UP IN BLUE

Dear Editor:

I wanted to write to express my feelings about the news of today (November 3, 2004). It's been a very disappointing day personally, one that I truly wished hadn't happened. I've been reading news sites and Bruce message boards and have been generally appalled at the childish behavior expressed by a lot of Bruce fans. Many of them are more than enjoying the moment, wanting to rub it into Bruce's face and any others that supported Kerry. It truly is a sad sight to behold.

I'm sure you'll be getting e-mail from die-hard Republican fans who are itching to say "I told you so" and "I hope he learned

his lesson." They are entitled to their opinions; however, I have to express my own. I have never been prouder to be a fan of Bruce Springsteen than right now. He took a stand at one of the most crucial times in our nation's history and put his integrity and beliefs on the line. Watching and listening to him over these past few months, I've come to realize how much I aspire to be like him, to stand up for the common man, to fight for ideas I believe in, to help everyone get a fair chance in life, not just the few and the privileged.

He has nothing to be ashamed of, as far as I'm concerned. Instead, he and everyone else that fought so hard for a change should feel nothing but pride. For it is only through striving for a better, rational, and humane government that we can truly grow as a nation united instead of what we have now, a nation divided. The fans who lost faith in Bruce because of the stand he took never really understood what he is all about. I'll never stop listening to Bruce, or buying his CDs or attending his concerts. It is because of him that I am involved with my local food bank. They have an autographed *Born in the U.S.A.* tour poster in their lobby that reads, "To the Capital Area Food Bank, Keep on Keepin' on, Bruce Springsteen." That's exactly what I plan on doing.

Tom Friedrich
Austin, TX

GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY

Dear Editor:

I have been aware of Bruce's popularity but admit not to having been a big fan. When I read the Boss's talk at that huge Ohio rally, I was moved by its power, authenticity and truth.

I have really grown to respect Bruce Springsteen during the past few months. While it may be easier for me, since I seem to share his views, I also understand the reluctance a popular figure might have to take a potentially unpopular stand. Clearly, irrespective of the election outcome, taking such a clear political stand would alienate nearly half the people. So Bruce had much to risk and a clear reason not to get involved. Despite this, he had the courage of his convictions and was willing to suffer the econom-

ic penalties that would follow. This surely is one true measure of courage: putting it all on the line for one's beliefs.

Clearly Bruce is our authentic poet laureate of American values. Now I am proud to be numbered amongst his devoted fans.

Errol Naiman
Via e-mail

MY BACK PAGES

Dear Editor:

Rocky Barra handed me a flyer out of the trunk of his car as I walked through the parking lot of the Pittsburgh Civic Arena. I was on my way to see Elvis for the first of four times. It was Monday, June 25, 1973, and the flyer was for the monthly magazine he published called *Strictly Elvis*. After I returned home I subscribed to his magazine, bought all the back issues, and stayed with him until it folded in 1977 (Elvis actually autographed the flyer for me).

In 1979, Phil Gelormine was publishing a slick Elvis quarterly called *Elvis World*. At that time I was 16 years old and was searching for a contemporary artist I could see in concert that would satisfy my musical tastes and fill the void in my collecting after Elvis' passing. Phil wrote about this guy who played for three hours, was a "wall of sound" and did "Heartbreak Hotel" in concert. The photo that accompanied the article was of Bruce Springsteen at his most recent Capital Center performance.

So in the early '80s, I'm walking through the parking lot of the Capital Center, on the way to see Springsteen for my first of 19 times (so far). A guy hands me a flyer from out of the trunk of his car—a flyer for *Backstreets*. After I returned home I subscribed. I missed the first three issues, but I ordered the back issues, got a reprint of #1, and I've been a subscriber ever since then.

As you can imagine, I was elated when I got the latest *Backstreets*. Your coverage of Elvis and Bruce was perfect. It really took me back. I was sitting on my porch, as I've done since the mid-'70s, reading a fanzine about Elvis again. I just want to thank you for the article and for being a part of my life all these years.

Brad Stalnaker
Clarksburg, WV

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The right to fight for the things he believes

Go Ahead, Man, Stand on It

By Christopher Phillips

It's been a raucous few months in the Springsteen fan community, with passions flowing and tempers flaring over the Presidential election. If you spent any time online in the last few months, you surely know what I mean: with some fans feeling angry and alienated by Bruce's political stand and others despondent over the election results, logging on to any number of Springsteen message boards has felt like tuning in to *Crossfire*. Here at *Backstreets*, checking e-mail after the election was a similar exercise in duck-and-cover; we got 518 furious messages directed to Springsteen (yes, we counted) decrying his political outspokenness, most ranging from "Shut up and sing!" to "Loser!" to "Shut up and sing, loser!"

From the beginning, *Backstreets* has been a magazine and a forum for Springsteen fans—for all Springsteen fans. To paraphrase something a wise man once said, we have readers of all political persuasions... and we like that, it's good. With recent events, some of us feel like he validated our political beliefs and our ideological connection to the man behind the songs. Some of us feel like he crossed a line in the relationship and waded into territories that made us choose sides between our political candidates and our musical heroes. Some in both camps were uncomfortable with any crossover of politics and rock music. And some in both camps were heartened by an artist taking a risky stand for a personal belief. But as I read one too many expletive-ridden e-mails from the disgruntled—asking how Bruce could dare to share his unsolicited political opinions (and then proceeding to share their own), or suggesting that *Backstreets* is a lackey for the Democratic party for printing Springsteen's P.S.A.—it felt like a good time to examine what *Backstreets* stands for, and what we don't.

Full disclosure up front: while I

don't consider myself a Democrat or a Republican, my political views tend to be well aligned with those Springsteen voiced on this tour. Personally, I've been tremendously inspired by the stand that he took, the message he was delivering, and the change toward a more progressive government that he was trying to effect. That said, *Backstreets* made a point of not endorsing a specific party or candidate—that's simply not what this magazine is about. Sure, we've reported on Springsteen's every Vote for Change move on our website and in these pages, even followed him on the campaign trail. Not to trivialize matters, but if Springsteen had been performing concerts in support of goldfish preservation, we'd be covering that, too—as well as interviewing an authority on goldfish. After all (now to paraphrase Michael Stipe), "We're *Backstreets* and this is what we do." As my brother reminded me along the way, "When I read *Fine Cooking*, I'm not looking for their take on Presidential politics." And that's a fine point. We are not a Democratic or a Republican magazine, we are a Springsteen magazine—and we plan to keep it that way.

It's trickier with *Backstreets*, of course, since political concerns have never been as far from Springsteen's work as they are from braised lamb shanks or a caramel flan. Nearly a quarter-century ago, Springsteen famously reacted to the election of Ronald Reagan with this statement in concert, before "Badlands": "I don't know what you guys think about what happened last night, but I think it's pretty frightening. You guys are young—there's gonna be a lot of people depending on you comin' up, so this is for you." While Springsteen's activism is usually traced back to 1979's Musicians United for Safe Energy concerts, and Bruce himself has named *Darkness on the Edge of Town* as the album when he started writing about broader American concerns, to me it was

that November 5, 1980 statement in Tempe, AZ that really seemed to mark the emergence of his public political consciousness. And I've always found significance in his acknowledgement that what he thinks may not be the same as what his audience thinks, but it doesn't affect his concern.

So when politics and music intersect, as they often do, it's not something we at the magazine feel we should avoid. "Musicians are getting a hard time for talking politics right now," Jesse Malin said from the stage last time I saw him live. "But politics are everywhere. It's what I see when I walk out my front door every day." And it's often what we hear in Springsteen's music. To follow his every professional move while ignoring the socio-political aspect would be missing an important layer of his work—it'd be like watching Elvis from the waist up. (And we would've had to skip most of the '90s altogether, from "Streets of Philadelphia" to "Dead Man Walkin'" to the *Tom Joad* tour and the Stop Proposition 209 rally.) But we do our best not to impose a political viewpoint on our coverage. We respect our readers' and fellow fans' right to disagree with Springsteen's views. We also see potential in the dialogues that this opens up; we believe that honest debate is good for this country and for the world.

ONE GUIDING LIGHT IN THIS regard has been my father. Sitting on opposite sides of the political fence, we've had many, uh, lively discussions about political and social issues over the years. While we've never been able to change each others' minds about politics, one thing he finally came around on was Springsteen. When I was growing up, my brother and I were both diehard Bruce fans, while Dad's favorite New Jersey son by far was Sinatra. Springsteen? "The guy can't sing!" But after finally seeing Springsteen and the E Street Band in 2000, and four more times on

the *Rising* tour, Dad is hooked. And I mean Is-there-a-video-of-the-Christic-shows hooked.

Staunch conservative that he is, he's been a fine example for me when it comes to the awareness that not all Springsteen fans see eye-to-eye—and that there's no inherent contradiction there. When we went to the penultimate *Rising* show at Shea together, I kept half an eye on him during the more political moments. For the P.S.A., he clapped—which was great to see, as I continue to believe that was an important, non-partisan call for us to be wary of what our elected representatives do in our name. When Bruce laughingly called for us to sing louder if we wanted to "impeach the President," Dad's hands were in his pockets and his mouth was shut. And when Al Franken burst on to the stage for a quick lap, Dad rolled his eyes and kept on enjoying the show. All of which struck me as perfectly—and open-mindedly—appropriate.

The Vote for Change tour, of course, was a tougher sell. I think his initial response was something along the lines of "No way in Hell." He didn't write Springsteen off, or burn his concert shirts, or send all his Springsteen CDs to *Backstreets* with an angry note (as two people actually did). He just didn't want his money going to MoveOn.org. Fair enough. He'd still be anticipating the next album, still be itching for the next tour or a chance to see a Christic/Somerville-style show—just like me. And I want him—or anybody like him—to keep looking forward to his next issue of *Backstreets*.

But while we're neither a liberal nor a conservative magazine, there's one stance we take fully and completely, one thing we do believe in without exception: Springsteen's right as a citizen and responsibility as an artist to express himself unreservedly. After years of bemoaning his lack of interviews and his storytelling gone M.I.A., after being fascinated by his occasional song expli-

cations and taking a lifetime's worth of inspiration from his lyrics... the last thing we want him to do is talk less. We work on the assumption that whatever your politics, anyone reading this magazine surely would like more glimpses into what makes Springsteen tick and what drives his art—and beyond that, would be open to the idea that the man who has written so many perceptive and penetrating songs might have valid and valuable insights to contribute to the broader public realm. (Even more valuable than many politicians, apparently. *The Nation's* John Nichols called Springsteen's stump speech, reprinted in this issue on page 45, "the most poignant and powerful election address of 2004," with "words that cut through the rhetorical fog.... In a year when so many meaningless words have been spilled along the campaign trail, Bruce Springsteen is saying something that matters.") The notion of "shut up and sing" is exactly contradictory to everything we get out of Springsteen's music, and everything we hope for from his concerts and his art in general.

Moreover, our society is at a point where free expression really does seem endangered. I don't think that's hyperbole when the leader of our country holds self-proclaimed "Town Hall Meetings" at which all of the attendees have been screened to be sympathetic to his views. When Springsteen released a statement in defense of the Dixie Chicks a couple years back, he wasn't just being nice. He wasn't coming to the rescue of damsels in distress. He was speaking out against a climate that increasingly discourages, sidelines, or even punishes those who speak against the status quo. When R.E.M. played the Washington, DC area in 2003, Michael Stipe had a few not-so-kind words to say about the administration. "And if you disagree with me," he said, pointing to the exit, "then, you know what?" He dropped his hand, chuckling, and continued, "Then we can disagree. That's the great thing about this country."

The best art can and should reflect our society back to us, in ways that can challenge our preconceptions and provoke discourse—and free expression is not only the best guarantee of

that kind of art, it's also one of the foundations of our democracy. As our government's system of checks and balances appears to be weakening—and as *The Daily Show's* Jon Stewart becomes a lone voice scrutinizing both the politicians and the media that cover them—we'd damn well better be able to have citizens speak their minds.

FOR BACKSTREETS, THESE concerns are nothing new. In issue #38, half this magazine's lifetime ago, Charles R. Cross wrote in this column: "If there is any message I've gotten from Springsteen's music over the years, it is the importance of personal expression. Part of the reason our country is in the shape we find it today is because too few people dare to express an opinion about anything.... Support the right of anyone who dares to stand behind an intelligent opinion, even if you don't agree with the opinion, because it is only through an open debate that we will ever achieve social change. You can no longer passively support the things you believe in because some of those things are getting lost every day, and free speech is one of them."

In that column, written as 1991 was rolling over to 1992, Charley was offering a Top 10 Wish List for the new year, in honor of the new song "The Wish" that had just debuted at the recent Christic show. Some of these *Backstreets* wishes still haven't come true ("I wish Southside and Little Steven hit the top of the charts," and "I wish scalpers disappeared"), while others, like "I wish for a boxed set," were granted years ago. Wish number nine is worth reprinting here in full:

"I wish people stood for something, and that includes Bruce Springsteen. It's easy in this world to let cynicism overwhelm you and to resign yourself that things won't change—and that goes for everything from Congressional scandals to CBS's crummy CD singles. Despite what may seem like overwhelming odds, personal integrity counts for something in this world. Don't be afraid of human connection (which I argue is one of the main reasons for this magazine). I hope in 1992 Bruce Springsteen does more to make his political message be heard loud, clear, and unadulterated."

After more than a decade, that wish has finally been fully realized. It wasn't a wish for Springsteen to proudly wave a banner for one political party or another, but for him to lay his beliefs on the line as he did in 2004—a move that stemmed not from a love of the Democratic party, but from the ideals and concerns that point to, as he poetically put it, the country he carries in his heart. Considering him a "loser" for doing so—as if he'd bet on the wrong team to win the World Series—misses the point entirely. As one *Backstreets* contributor wrote me in the days after the election, "I'd like to know when standing up for what you believe in became a win/lose situation." In 2003, Springsteen repeatedly said from the stage, "Protecting the democracy that we ask our sons and daughters to die for is our responsibility and our trust." In 2004, he demonstrated that those weren't empty words, as he took some of that responsibility for his own.

For the sake of some of our fellow fans, the health of the fan community, and for our own sake (as fans who like to forget about their troubles as much as the next guy), we'll also hope that not every step Springsteen takes results in such division. But the personal integrity he displayed and the risk he took by making his voice heard, by articulating a more complex view of America and of patriotism, and by compelling his audience to think about these issues—that, we applaud and encourage.

I did convince my dad to come to a Vote for Change concert with me. On the condition that he didn't have to pay a dime for the night's entertainment, we made a family trip to Orlando for the October 8 show. I was happy enough to pick up the tab, knowing that even though he didn't want his own money going to some left-wing organization, he'd kick himself if he missed Springsteen and John Fogerty sharing a mic. The morning after, though, he slipped me money for the ticket, every last cent. Less out of concern for my wallet, I'd like to think—and certainly not because Springsteen changed his mind the night before—but because he knew the show was worth it. Which made me think: maybe we can all get along. ➔



1. The Arcade Fire
Funeral
Merge (CD)

2. Loretta Lynn
Van Lear Rose
Interscope (CD)

3. Bright Eyes
I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning
Saddle Creek (advance CD)

4. Tom Waits
Real Gone
Anti (CD)

5. U2
How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb
Interscope (CD)

6. The Killers
Hot Fuss
Island (CD)

7. Wilco
A Ghost is Born
Nonesuch (CD)

8. Twilight Singers
She Loves You
One Little Indian (CD)

9. Interpol
Antics
Matador (CD)

10. The Mooney Suzuki
Alive & Amplified
Columbia (CD)

10 records
that helped make
this issue possible

STAGE

From Small Things, Big Benefits Come

Five Alive!

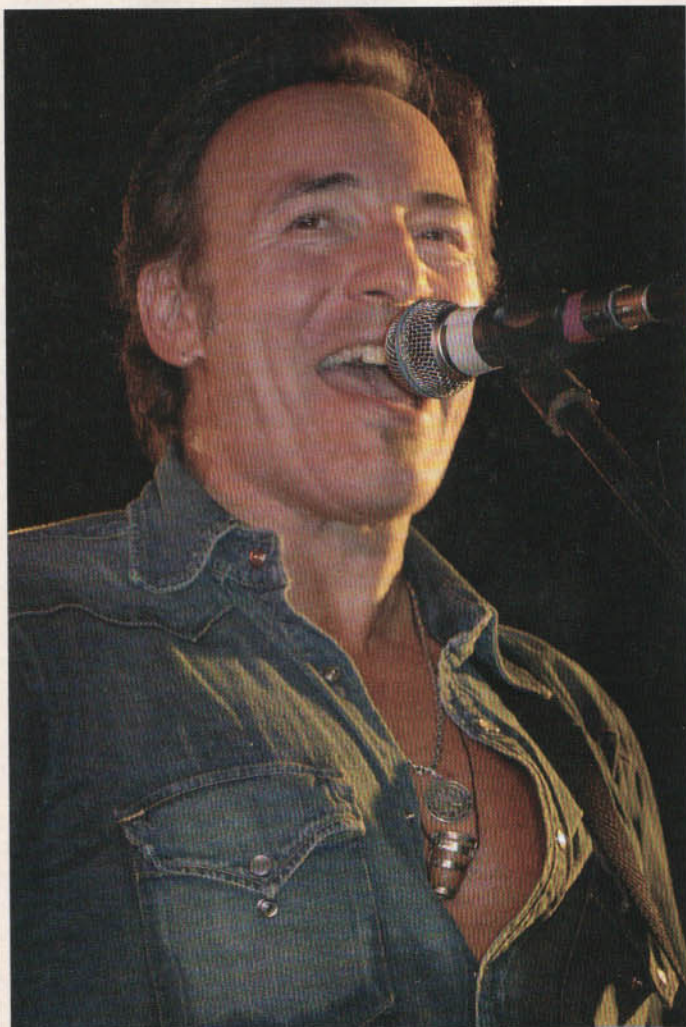
By Lisa Iannucci

Another edition of the annual Light of Day benefit turned out pretty much as expected—a birthday serenade and cake for founder Bob Benjamin; a strong, diverse lineup of artists; a packed house for the November 6 bill-topper Joe Grushecky; and an appearance by his good friend Bruce Springsteen.

Now in its fifth year, the event

stretched out to three nights for the first time (November 5-7, 2004), with Saturday's Grushecky-headlined show sandwiched by two full nights of music. Emotional overload from the Vote for Change tour and recent Presidential election informed the demeanor of more than a few attendees and performers, some of whom were clearly drained. Both the cause itself and the entertaining lineup of musicians were more than enough to draw people in, but it was a long weekend of music. Repeat performances by several local artists seemed superfluous when time constraints limited some of the more well-known performers (Jesse Malin, Pat Dinizio) to painfully brief sets; the order of performance on Saturday (notably the fine solo set by Jeffrey Gaines that immediately preceded the Houserockers) failed to effectively engage the audience, which at that point was primed to rock out. Finally, despite Bob Benjamin's stated affection for the Stone Pony, its selection as a venue seemed somewhat inappropriate for an event that has morphed from a concert to more of a music festival. All things considered, however, it is safe to say the majority of attendees got what they paid for.

The main draw of the weekend was, of course, the shoo-in appearance by Springsteen during Grushecky's set on night two. Fans lined up very early for what has now become almost routine, and Springsteen, as expected, showed up for the party. Wearing



RUTH BAROHN PHOTO

a denim shirt and loose fitting blue jeans, he arrived around 10 p.m. and repaired to the backstage area, appearing briefly to take in Willie Nile's outstanding set around eleven. Grushecky and his Houserockers took the

stage around 12:30, and Bruce was walked out through the back door—due to crowded conditions he had to enter the stage via the front entrance—and onto the Pony stage around 1 a.m., to the obvious delight of the crowd.

Goodness Gracious!

LOD5

November 6, 2004

Idiot's Delight
From Small Things (Big Things
One Day Come)
Homestead
Johnny 99
Code of Silence
Atlantic City
Murder Incorporated
Talking to the King
Never Be Enough Time
Mustang Sally
This Hard Land
Light of Day
Great Balls of Fire
Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On

with Joe Grushecky & the Houserockers, at the Fifth Annual Light of Day concerts to benefit the Parkinson's Disease Foundation and the Muscular Dystrophy Organization

DX1106	GA	GA1 174	ADULT
50.00 GEN ADMISSION 50.00			
GA	LIGHT OF DAY 5		
PP 4X	18 TO ENTER/21 TO DRINK		
GA1 174	STONE PONY		
CON4814	ASBURY PARK, NJ		
2NOV04	SAT NOV 6, 2004 5:00PM		



Johnny Grushecky rips it up with Joe & Bruce (left); event organizer Bob Benjamin takes a turn at the mic (right).

RUTH BAROHN PHOTO

RUTH BAROHN PHOTO

JOHN CAVANAUGH PHOTO

"Ladies and gentlemen, a man who needs no introduction... Bruce Springsteen!" Grushecky announced—and with that, they were off and running, performing a loose 90-minute set comprised mostly of Springsteen originals (some co-written with Grushecky), and capped off by a Jerry Lee Lewis two-fer. The proceedings opened with the pointed "Idiot's Delight," a scathing indictment of worldly affairs: "How did something so beautiful turn into an idiot's delight?" Eschewing the politically themed raps of his Vote for Change appearances, Bruce made it clear through his song selection that tonight the message would be in the music.

Indeed, the set list provided much food for thought. Songs such as "Atlantic City" (the emotional high point of the evening) and "This Hard Land" assumed added layers of meaning given recent events. On this night, with many in the audience feeling discouraged and disheartened, Bruce poured every ounce of energy into these songs of faith, hope, and perseverance. The intensity that he brought to the stage and which the faithful returned to him was such that it seemed at any minute they could change the course of events through sheer will power; when Bruce and the audience counted off the "1...2...3...4" during "Atlantic City," one halfway expected John Kerry himself to suddenly appear.

Throughout the set, Springsteen's performance was the star attraction, and he did not disappoint, adding intense guitar and harmonica solos on such tunes as "Murder Inc." and "Never Be Enough Time" (co-written with Grushecky), and playfully egging the crowd on during "Light of Day" with high-pitched entreaties to sing "a little bit louder." Lead vocals on the night's title track were taken by "birthday boy" Bob Benjamin, who joined the proceedings after taking the stage to thank participants and attendees.

After receiving birthday greetings and a cake, Benjamin, who suffers from Parkinson's, also gave a brief speech about his hopes for disease-related research in the second Bush Administration. Surprisingly, the political element of the speech elicited some less-than-kind responses from a few in the crowd. Then again, given the highly charged politi-

Continued page 54



Bruce hops the 23rd Street Express in NYC, September 21, 2004.

Scialfa Tour: Short, Sharp, Rocked

In September, just weeks before a high-profile jaunt with the E Street Band, Patti Scialfa played clubs on both coasts—only five shows, but it was the first full-fledged tour of her solo career. "Vote for Change kind of came up underneath my tour," she told the *Boston Herald*. "The question was whether I should even bother going out for just five shows. But I said, 'I don't care if it's only one show. I just want to get out and play.'"

While Scialfa has had a chance to showcase her own material at industry and TV gigs—a couple of performances during the *Rumble Doll* era, and a broadcast barrage in the early summer of 2004 for *23rd Street Lullaby* [see *Backstreets* #80]—this was a chance to bring her music and her band to the kind of sweaty clubs that Springsteen and the E Streeters played in the '70s. With her 23rd Streeters again including Soozie Tyrell and Nils Lofgren, Patti opened her five-city run at Asbury Park's Paramount Theatre, before moving on to Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Los Angeles.

Springsteen, who played at Scialfa's advance showcase concert for *23rd Street Lullaby* in April but bowed out of the subsequent record-release media blitz, joined his wife on stage for three of the five September concerts, beginning on opening night, September 15. "I have a surprise," Patti told the Asbury crowd, before Springsteen came out for the same two songs as in April. He played a sun-burst 12-string Telecaster on "As Long as I (Can Be

With You)" from *Rumble Doll*, and his honey blonde Tele on "Love (Stand Up)" from the new album. Springsteen took a low-key role, sharing a mic with Nils for occasional backing vocals and leaving the frontwoman to do her job at center stage, but he did step up for an extended guitar lead on "Love (Stand Up)."

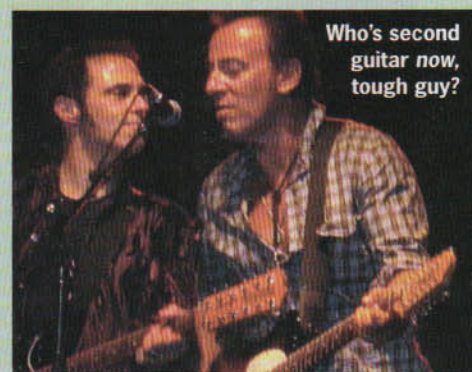
Perhaps not wanting to raise expectations on opening night, Scialfa told the Asbury crowd not to get on the internet and say Bruce would be at the next show in Boston, "because he won't!" Springsteen added, "I got kids to watch!" As concertgoer Melanie Reilly told *Backstreets*, "It was a nice touch. But she really didn't need him—she had it under control." Mixing material from her two albums, Scialfa and her band—also including Steve Jordan on drums, Willie Weeks on bass, and Jane Scarpantoni on cello—"really rocked the place," said Reilly.

True to their words, Boston and the Philly show that followed were Boss-free. But Bruce was back for the final two, at New York's Bowery Ballroom on September 21 and the Roxy in L.A. on September 25. Also joining Scialfa's band at the Roxy (though not sharing the stage with Springsteen) was Sheryl Crow, who sang with Patti of the joys of "City Boys." Springsteen joined in on the same two songs at each show—as well as at the Continental Airlines Arena less than a month later, when Patti and her band opened the 10/13 Vote for Change concert for their biggest gig yet.

Backstreets reader Doc Rich described the scene as Springsteen left the Bowery Ballroom stage: "As he sped past us on his way back upstairs, all back-slaps and handshakes, one woman yelled, 'Bruce, you have an awesome wife!' He turned around, smiled, and said 'Thanks, I know!' before disappearing to the balcony."

Meeting fans before the Roxy show, Patti signed and took pictures while Springsteen demurred: "It's Patti's night." And it was clearly Patti's tour, the presence of her husband giving fans an extra treat without ever overshadowing the proceedings. ➔

—Christopher Phillips



Who's second guitar now, tough guy?



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 Each is crafted from sterling silver and
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Buy several now and a few more next month.
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 STENGEL



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 OF SUMMER

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 loss, redemption and hope at www.67records.com.
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YOUR STRENGTH GIVES US STRENGTH • YOUR FAITH GIVES US FAITH • YOUR HOPE GIVES US HOPE • YOUR LOVE BRINGS US LOVE • YOUR STRENGTH GIVES US

Dear Bruce— For decades you have taught us,
 by example, the power and the right we have to
 stand up and speak out for what we believe in.
 We share your values and your ideals. We will
 always continue to need you, and we know you
 will not let us down. We love and admire you,
 respect and listen to you, and most of all, Bruce,
 we thank you.

Amy Widenbaum, West Bloomfield (Detroit), MI

Hey, Bruce— Thanks for
 showing your support for
 John Kerry! I feel isolated here
 (politically) since moving from
 Boston. Come on down sometime soon and let
 your voice and music be heard!

Chris Norcott, Canton, GA

Thanks, Bruce, for always giving me a reason to
 hope and a reason to smile.

Nancy Vanden Houten, Teaneck, NJ

Thanks for standing up for what is right and true,
 and for rocking while doing it!

Karen Chapman, Denver, CO

Once again, Bruce, your message and zeal
 touched my heart, and made a difference in how
 my vote was cast on Election Day. For twenty
 years I've been proud to proclaim you and your
 music as a powerful and energetic influence in
 my life. Thanks!

Wandy Oviedo, Tucson, AZ

Thanks to everyone involved in the VFC Tour.
 Musicians, crews, management, and audi-
 ences. You were an inspiration to all citizens
 who believe that America's finest days lie ahead.
 Although those days are a little further into the
 future than we had hoped, let's not give up just
 before the miracle! "Endure, and save yourself
 for better times!"

Martha Cleaves, Glen Gardner, NJ

"THANKS, BRUCE!"

Thank you for continuing to fight and sing for
 what you believe in. You are an inspiration, and I
 have never been more proud to say I'm a fan.

Brad Rosenberg, New York, NY

Bruce— thanks for your efforts to help make
 America a better place. You've always been and
 continue to be a great inspiration.

Amy Tyson, Queens, NY

Thanks for giving us a reason to believe. Your
 efforts were not in vain.

Kate Marthaler, Annapolis, MD

Thanks to all on the VFC Tour, and especially to
 Bruce for *once again* standing up. Remember,
 in the end, the artists and thinkers are *always*
 proven right.

Jerome Davis & Simmie Kastner, Raleigh, NC

Bruce— Keep your steel wheels singing and
 hang in there, 'cause we're going to need you
 now more than ever!

Patty Valese, Bloomfield, NJ

Bruce has been there for us for over thirty years.
 We the fans, young and old, have always loved
 him for what he means to us and our great
 country. No one has ever written about

America— our values, our
 hopes, our fears, and our
 dreams—like The Boss.

Matt Caris, Chicago, IL

Additional thanking contributors:

Eric Schecter, Verona, NJ
Drew Tressler, New York, NY
Mike Lustig, Ridgefield, NJ
Linda Randall, Oneonta, NY

Paid for by the individuals named in this ad, with
 love and gratitude to the Boss. Thank you to Bright
 Eyes, Jackson Browne, Tracy Chapman, Death
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 Edmonds, John Fogerty, Ben Harper, Jurassic 5,
 Keb' Mo', Dave Matthews, My Morning Jacket,
 Pearl Jam, John Prine, Bonnie Raitt, R.E.M., Bruce
 Springsteen, James Taylor, Neil Young, MoveOnPAC,
 everyone else involved in the VFC Tour, your bands,
 crews and families, and to all who didn't surrender.
 A donation has been made to Habitat for Humanity
 in honor of you and your efforts to better America.
"The people have the power!"

DISC

Years ago, as vinyl began to go the way of the eight-track tape, we changed the name of this column from "On Record" to "On Disc"; we hope we won't have to retitle it any time soon, but November 5 brought another step toward the new frontier. Just days after the Presidential election, Springsteen made his interpretation of "The Star-Spangled Banner" available on his website (www.brucespringsteen.net). He performed this instrumental version of the National Anthem nightly to open his Vote for Change set; the track posted was actually a studio recording. While Springsteen has previously used the internet to preview new material, offering songs from *The Rising* before the album's release, this marked the first time he has made a new track exclusively available online.

Back on the old-fashioned shiny discs, Bruce songs could be found on several new compilation CDs in recent months. Only one was previously unreleased: a live recording of "My Ride's Here" (a one-off performance with the E Street Band in Toronto, 9/10/03) included on *Enjoy Every Sandwich: The Songs of Warren Zevon*. The tribute was issued on October 19 by Artemis. "Nebraska" was part of the round-up of American ballads on *The Rose & the Briar*, a companion CD to the new book by the same name. [see "On the Books," this page].

Michael Moore included Springsteen's live version of "Chimes of Freedom" on *Songs and Artists That Inspired Fahrenheit 9/11*. Not a soundtrack per se, the collection presents music that inspired Moore and his crew as they were shooting the film, with sales benefiting the Fallen Patriot Fund. Moore points out, "I have had [Springsteen's] music playing in all my work, starting with 'My Hometown' in *Roger & Me*. He is who we all aspire to be! He never broke faith." (Also of note: Little Steven's "I Am a Patriot" opens Moore's mix.)

A new German pressing of the *Nebraska* CD houses the jewel-case in a unique die-cut slipcase, with the disc itself made to look like a vinyl LP, down to the label and grooves on the non-playing side. The reissue is part of the "Vinyl Classics" series, released by Columbia in conjunction with German magazine *Der Spiegel*.



While the packaging is novel, there is no remastering here or any other sonic upgrade—this one is worth seeking out for collectors only.

In the world of video, Bruce Springsteen *In Concert: MTV Plugged* has finally been made available in the DVD format, more than a decade after its release on VHS and LaserDisc. Most of the September 22, 1992 performance captured here was broadcast on MTV a couple of months later; the DVD adds the non-broadcast bonus tracks from the out-of-print VHS ("Living Proof" and "If I Should Fall Behind") and LaserDisc ("Roll of the Dice") for a total of 19 songs.

Peter Bogdanovich's 1985 film *Mask* originally featured extensive use of Springsteen's music, the favorite of Roy "Rocky" Dennis. By the time the movie was released to theaters, the Bruce element had to be stripped (against the director's will), with songs like "Badlands," "Thunder Road," and "Racing in the Street" replaced by Bob Seger songs. A new director's cut, now on DVD from Universal, restores Springsteen's prominent place in the film and presents the original soundtrack, down to "The Promised Land" in the closing credits. "Now it exists in the form that it should have existed in 20 years ago," Bogdanovich told ESPN. "I think you'll find it a much better picture." Bogdanovich also discusses the Springsteen element in a commentary track on the DVD.

Springsteen contributed "Into the Fire" to *Wellstone!*, a documentary on DVD from Hard Working Picures about the life of the late Senator Paul Wellstone. Visit www.carryitforward.org for more information.

—Christopher Phillips

THE BOOKS

THE ROSE & THE BRIAR: DEATH, LOVE AND LIBERTY IN THE AMERICAN BALLAD (Norton, \$26.95)
Edited by Sean Wilentz and Greil Marcus

The central thesis of *The Rose & the Briar* is that the American ballad is "a major form—musically, perhaps, the major form—through which Americans told each other about themselves and the country they inhabited," or so states the introduction to this book. Dave Marsh, writing one of the 23 essays that make up this delicious new volume, is more succinct: "Humans invent songs and stories so they can be repeated." Through that repetition, we learn about our culture, our values, and our hopes and dreams. This collection is in large part a history of the evolution of the ballad, but it also at times reads like a short primer on American history.

Marsh and two-dozen other contributors seek to use a single song as a window to speak to the larger power of the ballad as a form of American communication. Some of the essays read like academic papers, while others, like R. Crumb's cartoon treatise on "When You Go A Courtin'," take a less obvious route. Edited by Greil Marcus and Sean Wilentz, the book includes essays by novelist Joyce Carol Oates, esteemed jazz critic Stanley Crouch, musician David Thomas of Pere Ubu, and several noted music critics. Though many of the songs chosen here are obscure folk and blues numbers, Eric Weisbard's chapter on Dolly Parton's "Down From Dover" and Steve Erickson's take on Randy Newman tackle the role of the modern ballad in popular music. A companion CD by the same name is available separately, featuring a number of the songs written about in the book.

Fans of Bruce Springsteen will be most interested in Howard Hampton's 15-page essay on the song "Nebraska," a tune included on the compact disc. Hampton calls the *Nebraska* album Springsteen's *O Brother Where Art Thou?* His insightful essay ties the song and album to a number of American icons including Flannery O'Connor, Robert Frank, John Ford, Woody Guthrie, Marlon Brando, and John Steinbeck, just to name a few. At points, Hampton's essay seems to weigh down in these never-ending shout-outs, much the way Robert Coles's *Bruce Springsteen's America* seemed over-striving. When Hampton calls "Badlands" a "prematurely post-modernist John Ford film," he teeters on the edge of the graduate student abyss, where scholars begin to analyze Springsteen's songs and forget that these are rock 'n' roll songs first, and meant to be entertaining in their populism.

Hampton's essay ultimately pulls out of this curve, however, and when he more directly analyzes the structure of the ballad, his prose is sharp and astute. Many music fans may have sung along to "Nebraska" knowing it was about a killer on the run, but without ever examining the narrative structure of the song, which is equally bizarre. Hampton correctly writes that "Nebraska" is a song about "a dead man looking back on these terrible events as an out-of-body experience." He also calls the song a "death trip rolling across the plains like a shadow," and later cites "tattered phantoms across a mute landscape," certainly more bookish language that the plain-talk used in the song, but evocative nonetheless. By the time Hampton ends his essay with a brief take on the "smirk" behind the narrator in "Reason to Believe," he has added much to our understanding of *Nebraska*, what can unequivocally be argued—by either academics or music fans—one of Bruce Springsteen's most important albums.

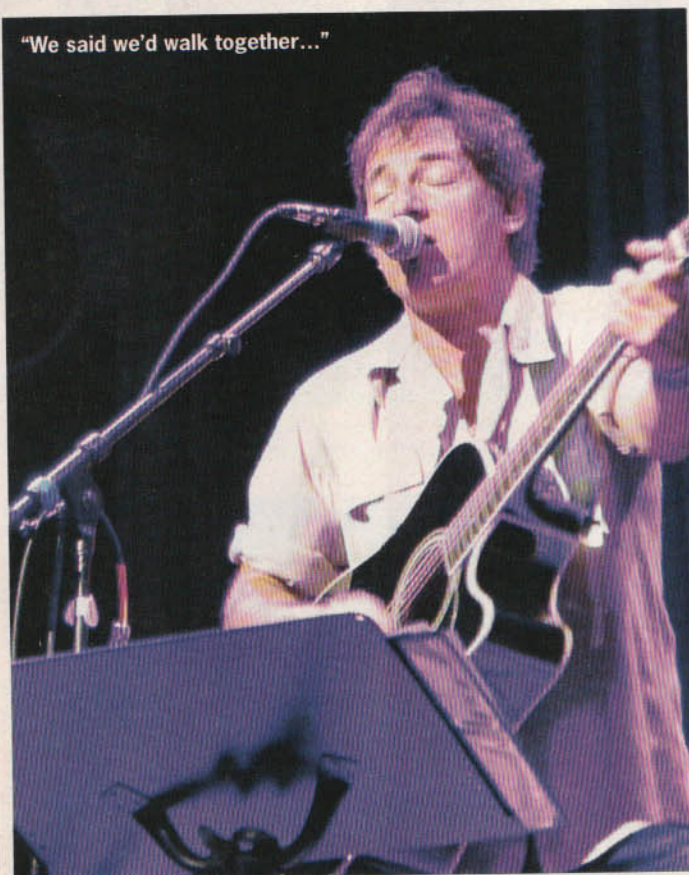
—Charles R. Cross



Flood Aid helps the Homestead

Pumping Up the Iron City

MIKE BEDER PHOTO



"We said we'd walk together..."

By Lisa Iannucci

Downtown Pittsburgh was aglow with Christmas lights and holiday cheer as concertgoers began to descend upon Heinz Hall just before 7 p.m. on a brisk Thursday night. Inside, a fully laden Christmas tree decorated the lobby, and the smells of hot cider and eggnog—and the buzz of anticipation—filled the air. The lush, gilt-trimmed venue (complete with red carpet and chandeliers) was generously lent by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra for this charity event, the brainchild of Steel City native Joe Grushecky.

Grushecky was moved to action just weeks earlier by the devastating effects of Hurricane Ivan on nearby Carnegie, PA (where his band the Houserockers stores their gear) and immediately put his Rolodex to work. He recruited his pal

Bruce Springsteen at the annual Light of Day benefit in early November and went on to assemble a great night of Pittsburgh rock to help get his friends and neighbors back on their feet.

Not too many rock 'n' roll benefit concerts include poetry in the line-up, but on this night the audience was treated to Pennsylvania Poet Laureate Sam Hazo's recitation of "To Be," his poem celebrating the generosity of community. The audience, comprised mostly of locals, greeted him with warm applause, as they did the many local artists who graced the stage. First on the bill was sixteen-year-old Johnny Grushecky, who was introduced by none other than Bruce himself (as one of the emcees later remarked, how many teenage musicians can say *that?*). Entering the stage virtually unnoticed, clad in T-shirt and jeans, Springsteen admonished

the crowd with the now familiar "no Broooocing" warning and left the stage before many had even taken their seats. A brief set by Jill West & Blues Attack followed, and the house was still not completely full when Springsteen made a surprise reappearance about half an hour later with the New Jersey based band Exit 105, taking lead vocals and guitar on Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" to conclude their set.

More local music ensued, as Bill Deasy (formerly of local favorites The Gathering Field) joined Clarks guitarist Rob James for an acoustic set. They were followed by Pittsburgh rocker Donnie Iris, whose performance of his early-'80s hits "Ah! Leah!" and "Love Is Like a Rock" got the natives in the audience dancing and shouting back the lyrics.

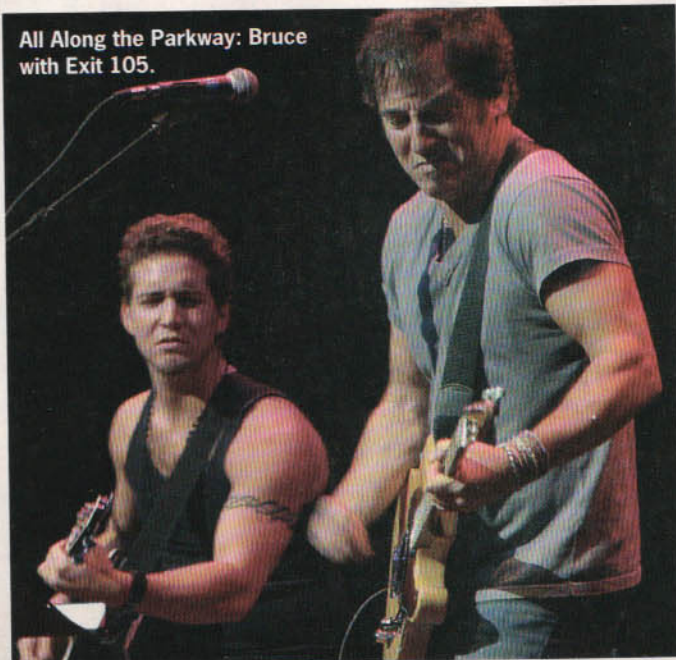
Bruce's portion of the evening began with a stark acoustic set. After striding unobtrusively onto a dimly lit stage, he led off with "If I Should Fall Behind." Often

performed as an ensemble a cappella number with the E Street Band, in this context the song lent a quiet solemnity to the proceedings, its themes of community and shared sacrifice laid bare by the austere arrangement. Up next was a rarely-performed acoustic version of "Land of Hope and Dreams," followed by "For You," dedicated to "the old fans," who responded by singing along word for word.

After being graced with so many raucous full band shows in the last few years, it is easy to forget just how dynamic a performer Springsteen is on the acoustic guitar. He brings more intensity to the instrument than most people have by their second encore, and it is fascinating to hear him rework 30-year-old songs and make them new again, a feat he accomplishes effortlessly. The acoustic portion was all too brief—can we have another

JOE GRUSHECKY
...
KING
IDIOTS
SMALL THINGS E
HOMESTEAD
CODE
JOHNNY 99
NEVER BE
A.C.
TRUE COMP.
FACTORY
EVERYTHING
MURDER
LAND
PUMP
LUCKY / SANTA

All Along the Parkway: Bruce with Exit 105.



JOHN CAVANAUGH PHOTO



acoustic tour, please?—but by this time, the faithful were more than ready for Bruce to rock out with hometown hero Grushecky and his band.

There may have been few surprises in terms of material in the Springsteen/Houserockers set, but there was no shortage of Pittsburgh pride, as Joe and his band (ably assisted by son Johnny and the ubiquitous Tony "Boccigalupe" Amato) celebrated their city with tributes such as "Homestead" and "Pumping Iron," the audience shouting out lyrics along with their hometown boys. Call it home field advantage, call it the holiday spirit, but there was truly a remarkable electricity in the room both in the seats and onstage on this night. The grins of sheer pleasure that passed between both father and son (and between son and Springsteen) were themselves inspirational, and on tunes such as "Everything's Going to Work Out Right," it seemed as if the mere fact of saying such things aloud would make it so—that the power of the performance and the energy of the crowd could truly make things right again, not just in the Pittsburgh area, but for the beleaguered country as well.

For his part, Springsteen loosened things up a bit with two of his often-overlooked tunes: "From Small Things (Big Things One Day Come)," his nod to Chuck Berry, and the darkly powerful "Murder Incorporated." "Atlantic City" is always a high point of any Springsteen set because of its unique intensity and passion, but the goosebump-

inducing event of this particular evening had to be his stark rendition of "Factory." Often played by Bruce on the 1999-2000 tour as a duet with Patti Scialfa, the song was performed with minimal backing by the Houserockers, Bruce blowing passionately into the harp at center stage. In a blue collar town that has for several decades felt the direct impact of the collapse of the American industrial base, the significance of this selection was not lost on its audience; in this intimate setting, with the added weight of circumstance, it was positively transcendent.

It being a benefit and it being Christmastime, an all-star jam on the Spector-ized "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town" was a vir-

tual necessity. So after Bruce and Houserockers blew through "Lucky Town," on trooped all of the evening's performers for the expected finale. There were a few "special guests" too, as Jesse Malin and his band, en route to a gig, had stopped by to take in the show and were called up onstage—after donning the requisite Santa hats, of course. Springsteen, a veteran of many end-of-night jams, stage-managed the proceedings fairly well; still, chaos was all but inevitable, especially after "Santa Claus" sneaked on with his goody bag, and two "elves" clad in green began hurling gifts into the crowd. At length, after several stops and starts, the song came to a riotous conclusion, with musicians

arm in arm, smiling broadly one and all.

Throughout the program, more than one artist had mentioned Bruce's legendary generosity of spirit and of action, and there was no arguing that point in Pittsburgh on this night—after all, Springsteen had promised Grushecky, "tell me when, and I'll be there," and he was. In a perfect world, all of us would be lucky enough—as Joe Grushecky is—to count people like Bruce Springsteen amongst our friends. On nights like this, as his fans, we already do. 🐻

Flood Aid benefitted the Salvation Army (www.salvationarmy.org), to help victims of the September 17, 2004 flooding in Pennsylvania.



MIKE BEDER PHOTO



CHRISTMAS COMES EARLY

December 2, 2004

Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh, PA

with Exit 105

All Along the Watchtower

solo acoustic

If I Should Fall Behind/Land of Hope and Dreams/For You

with Joe Grushecky & the Houserockers

Talking to the King/From Small Things (Big Things One Day Come)/Homestead/Code of Silence/Johnny 99/Never Be Enough Time/Atlantic City/True Companion/Factory/Everything's Going to Work Out Right/Murder Incorporated/This Hard Land/Pumping Iron/Lucky Town/Santa Claus is Comin' to Town

OLIPS

IS IT BOSS TIME?: Nothing is more on the lips and minds of Springsteen fans lately than a new album—and several sources tell *Backstreets* that it's very near completion, with a tour to follow. Springsteen spent much of the fall in the studio, working again with *Rising* producer Brendan O'Brien, and the rumor mill has been a-churnin' ever since. It's still too early to nail down an ETA (though all signs point to *soon*), or the extent of the E Street Band's involvement (signs point to *slight*). Watch *Backstreets.com* for breaking news, and we wouldn't be surprised if we find ourselves reviewing Springsteen's follow-up to *The Rising* in our next issue. Stay tuned. . . . In the meantime, Springsteen's political involvement in the Fall earned him a slot on *Rolling Stone's* "2004 People of the Year" list. In the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Jon Bream declared Bruce's October 5 Vote for Change show the best Minnesota concert of the year. (The St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, on the other hand, suspended two of its reporters for seeing the show, due to its dual nature as a political fundraiser). . . . The Fall also brought Springsteen a Grammy nomina-

tion, with "Code of Silence" from *Essential* getting the nod for "Solo Rock Vocal Performance"; Bruce is up against Ryan Adams, Steve Earle, Melissa Etheridge, and Tom Waits at the 47th Annual Grammy Awards on February 13. . . . Back on September 10, Bruce was presenting an award to someone else, honoring Sean Penn with the 2004 John Steinbeck Award. (Springsteen himself was the first recipient, back in 1996.) "My friend Sean Penn is very cool," Springsteen told the San Francisco Palace of Fine Arts audience. "He has a little bit of that 1940s Robert Mitchum cool. My admiration even survived his dating my sister—but it was close." Accepting the award, Penn called Springsteen "one of the most important creative inspirations in my life." . . . The American Film Institute ranked "Streets of Philadelphia" at number 68 on their "100 Years, 100 Songs: America's Greatest Movie Music" list, right between "On the Good Ship Lollipop" and "Nobody Does It Better." . . . And somewhere between *spectaculaire* and *stade*, Bruce Springsteen will be among the new entries of the 2005 edition of the French dictionary, *Le Petit Larousse Illustré*. *C'est magnifique!*

OUT ON E STREET: *Rolling Stone* editors picked Patti Scialfa's

23rd *Street Lullaby* as one of their 50 Records of the Year. In addition to her own fall tour, Patti shared the stage with the Bacon Brothers and others at a Writers in the Raw concert in November. . . . Garry Tallent, in Washington, DC for the Vote for Change tour, joined Brian Wilson on October 10 at the Warner Theater to play bass on "Surfin' U.S.A." . . . Clarence Clemons and Steve Van Zandt are now not just bandmates but channel-mates, with the Big Man flexing his acting muscles on HBO's *The Wire* (most prominently in episode #33, "Moral Midgetry"). . . . Max Weinberg had to take a hiatus from his own tellyvision show in early November to recover from a broken collarbone (sustained at a post-election football game at Senator John Kerry's). Max was healed up in time for his own holiday shows at B.B. King's. . . . Little Steven's been as busy as ever. He contributed "Baby Please Don't Go" to Nancy Sinatra's new self-titled album, showing up to play it with her at Joe's Pub in New York on December 1. He also found time to mastermind not one but two holiday albums this year. His *Christmas with the Kranks* soundtrack com-

pilation brought together classics from Elvis, Brenda Lee, and the Ramones, with new songs from Underground Garage faves like the Chesterfield Kings, the Charms, and the Raveonettes, as well as Disciple of Soul Jean Beauvoir. *Kranks* featured six songs arranged and produced by Steve, including a new song he wrote, "Navidad." And then

there was the Little Steven-produced *Fuzz for the Holidays* by Davie Allan & the Arrows, the first release on Steve's own label, Wicked Cool Records. The CD was yours

when you joined Steven's new fan club—that's right, years ago, you could be a Disciple of Soul, and now you can be a citizen of Little Steven's Renegade Nation. Visit www.littlestevenundergroundgarage.com/fanclub for more on his latest bandana brigade.

IN THE CAN: Bono recently gave some insight into his vocal delivery on the original "Do They Know It's Christmas," telling the *Daily Telegraph* (UK) that he had tried to imitate Bruce Springsteen, but ended up sounding "like Springsteen sitting on the toilet." . . . For another benefit blast from the past, look for the



ON LIPS: VFC SPECIAL EDITION

"I always felt that the musician's job, as I experienced it growing up, was to provide an alternative source of information, a spiritual and social rallying place, somewhere

you went to have a communal experience. I don't know if someone is going to run to the front of the stage and shout, 'I'm saved' or 'I'm switching,' but I'm going to try. I will be calling anyone in a bow tie to come to the front, and I'll see what I can do."

—Bruce Springsteen (*Rolling Stone*)

"Everyone was super friendly. Bruce Springsteen and his wife Patti sat down right next to me. He asked, 'Hey man, is this seat taken?' and I'm like, 'No dude, it's cool.' He's like, 'Hi, I'm Bruce,' and I'm, 'Uh, yeah, you're the Boss.' So by the next day, we're just shooting the shit with Bruce Springsteen, standing on the patio. I mean, we're not friends or anything like that, but it was pretty incredible to have these interactions with people who I've grown up listening to and admiring. When you get to have a career like one of those [artists], you really have nothing to prove anymore."

—Death Cab for Cutie's Ben Gibbard, after August's Vote for Change artist conference (MTV News)

"I think it's important to speak in a measured voice. We want respect for the office of the Presidency. We don't want to be Bush bashers. We are Bush questioners."

—Springsteen (*Los Angeles Times*)

"He thinks making millions with a song-and-dance routine allows him to tell you how to vote. Here's my vote: Boycott the Boss. If you don't buy his politics, don't buy his music."

—Marilyn O'Grady, New York Conservative Party candidate for U.S. Senate (TV spot)

"You don't stand up at a rock show and lecture people unless your name is Gandhi. We're musicians, not politicians. We get that.... I'm getting sheets with information on things like grain subsidies. I don't think about this stuff on that level. I approach this whole thing as a guy who plays guitar and feels a particular way."

—Peter Buck (*Time*)

"I'm a mild-mannered rock musician of a certain age.... My powers are limited. All I ask is for the right to have an opinion and the right to share it, same as anybody else."

—Springsteen (*Time*)

"Bruce Springsteen was one of the coolest dudes I've ever met. Seriously, I didn't expect that dude to be as cool as he was. C'mon, people call this cat 'The Boss.' I'm like, 'He ain't the boss of me!' [laughs] He was the exact opposite, he was so accommodating it scared me. Why is this dude, who doesn't have to make another record in his life, this cool? His wife was even cooler. He was making people like Babyface come over, talk to us and vibe with us. All in all, [Vote for Change] was an incredible experience... something that I wouldn't trade for the world."

—Jurassic 5's Chali 2NA (*BallerStatus.net*)

two-DVD set *We Are the World: The Story Behind the Song* to be released on February 1. This is a 20th Anniversary Edition of the "making of" home video released in 1985, which adds two extra hours of behind-the-scenes stuff—for a total of more than four hours of footage from the January 28, 1985 session. If you can sit through all that for glimpses of the Boss, you're made of strong stuff. But do it for the children: proceeds will benefit USA for Africa, still fighting hunger and AIDS. . . . *SCTV Volume 1*, the first DVD compilation of the seminal sketch comedy show, includes Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes' musical guest spot from May 1981, performing "All I Want is Everything" and "The Fever." Look closely and you'll see Patti Scialfa singing backup, and don't miss the Jukes playing a wedding band in a sketch called "The Fracasas." . . . Johnny himself has dug into the vaults for an archival release from the same era—his new *Missing Pieces* CD gathers previously released outtakes recorded with the Jukes in 1982. . . . Jukes saxophonist Eddie Manion has released his first album, *Follow Through*, with guests including Bobby Bandiera, Ernest "Boom" Carter, Patti Scialfa, Soozie Tyrell, and Lisa Lowell. Check it out at www.eddiemanion.com.

COVER GIRL: Minnie Driver, a self-described "huge Bruce Springsteen fan," covers "Hungry Heart" on her debut LP, *Everything I've Got In My Pocket*. "I figure he may have heard my version of his song by now," she told *USA Today* in the fall. "His wife's away on tour, so maybe he's had a few lonely nights and thought he would check out some crazy actress' version of one of his great tunes." Oh yeah, we'll bet that's the first thing he did. . . . Pete Dinklage includes "Atlantic City" on his *Live From New Jersey*, in stores now. . . . If you ever thought that Steve Earle's "Sweet Little '66" was reminiscent of "Racing in the Street," well, apparently Earle hears it too—on the road he's been singing the first verse of "Racing" as an intro to his own tune. . . . Despite Bruce's benefit concerts for the struggling *DoubleTake* magazine, they threw in the towel this fall with a message on their website: "We're sorry it had to end; we've simply run out of money and are unable to find sustained sources of support." . . . And a farewell to disk jockey Scott Muni, who died in September at the age of 74. "The Professor" spent nearly 50 years on the New York airwaves and served as program director of WNEW, where he was one of the first to spin Springsteen's music on the radio. Rest in Peace, Scottso. ➔



BOSS JUNKIES

Canada's Cowboy Junkies recently went to the Bruce Springsteen well for a third time, when the group included a cover of "Thunder Road" on a bonus disc that accompanied its latest album, *One*

Soul Now. Singer Margo Timmins explained to *Backstreets* that "all of us are huge Springsteen fans. I've always loved that song; it's one of the most beautiful songs ever written."

Interestingly, Timmins says she's attracted to "Thunder Road" by what she feels is a feminine perspective in the song: "To me, 'Thunder Road' is a real woman's song. It speaks of aging and losing certain dreams that you might have as a young woman that I don't think young men have. It's just a song I've always wanted to sing from my perspective, a woman's perspective." Timmins says the group actually tried to record it several years ago but wasn't satisfied with the results. "I don't think I had the skill to do what I wanted to do with it," she says. "I knew how I wanted to do it but just didn't have the talent yet. So we waited and brought it back. I'm very happy with this take on it; it has a nice balance between the sadness and the beauty I think is part of that song."

The Junkies first covered Springsteen with a version of "State Trooper" on 1986's *Whites Off Earth Now!*, which preceded their breakthrough album *The Trinity Sessions*. A rendition of "My Father's House" was included as a hidden track on the 1999 compilation *Rarities, B-Sides and Slow Sad Waltzes*. Both songs, as well as "Thunder Road," have been part of the group's live repertoire.

—Gary Graff

"It was fabulous. It's getting to be exorbitantly expensive for me, but it was terrific."

—Investigative reporter Chuck Laszewski on the October 5, 2004 Vote for Change concert, for which he was suspended from the St. Paul Pioneer Press for attending. (*Billboard*)

"I was very glad when Vote for Change came about and when Bruce decided to participate. I think that everybody who has young children thinks about what kind of world we're handing over that they're going to grow up in. You wonder what you can do individually, even the smallest thing, to help make it a better place. But I don't want it to seem these are words from him. And I'm not a spokesperson for Vote for Change. All I can say is I'm very proud of Bruce. I thought it was time to do something."

—Patti Scialfa (*Boston Globe*)

"I'm doing this tour because Bruce wants me to, and friendship is far more important than politics.... The important thing is that if you're going to vote for John Kerry, do so as an independent."

—Steve Van Zandt, stressing that "he is not a Democrat and cherishes independence of thought in fellow artists and others." (*Seattle Times*)

"I never spoke to anybody [in the band] about [the politics]. We would watch the debates—not all of us, those of us interested would watch the debates in the dressing room, they happened on nights we were playing concerts—we never really discussed politics with each other. It never occurred to me. I'd been campaigning for John Kerry since he announced; I was in Iowa, I was in New Hampshire. I was delighted to be able to go out and play

music in support of John Kerry and John Edwards, rather than simply speak...

"I do believe that we performed with one mindset: that it was important to voice these positions, this mission statement, which was to create a more progressive government, and a government that's responsive to its citizens—all of its citizens, not just the one percent of its citizens that it's responsive to. Although it did raise a lot of money... more importantly, it raised consciousness, and got people to register to vote. We had a huge amount of registration drives in the halls each day, and that was important."

"So I felt particularly proud to be involved with [Vote for Change]. I mean, I can do whatever I can do on a very limited basis, but when you've got someone as important as Bruce, or Michael Stipe, Jackson Browne, the Dixie Chicks—people who really have large audiences out there—it was the right thing at the right time, in my view..."

"No one has an excuse to be apathetic. And whether you vote right or vote left, it's just crucial to vote. And as you travel around the world—and I've been in places where people don't have the right to vote—you recognize what an incredible privilege it is."

—Max Weinberg (Interview with Glenn Gass, Indiana University)

"Tomorrow I'm going to return to my job as a mild-mannered rock musician. But it's been inspiring, and I've been glad to be able to be out here."

—Bruce Springsteen, on Election Eve (*Nightline*)



SONGS FOR SWINGIN' VOTERS

Bruce Springsteen & Friends roll



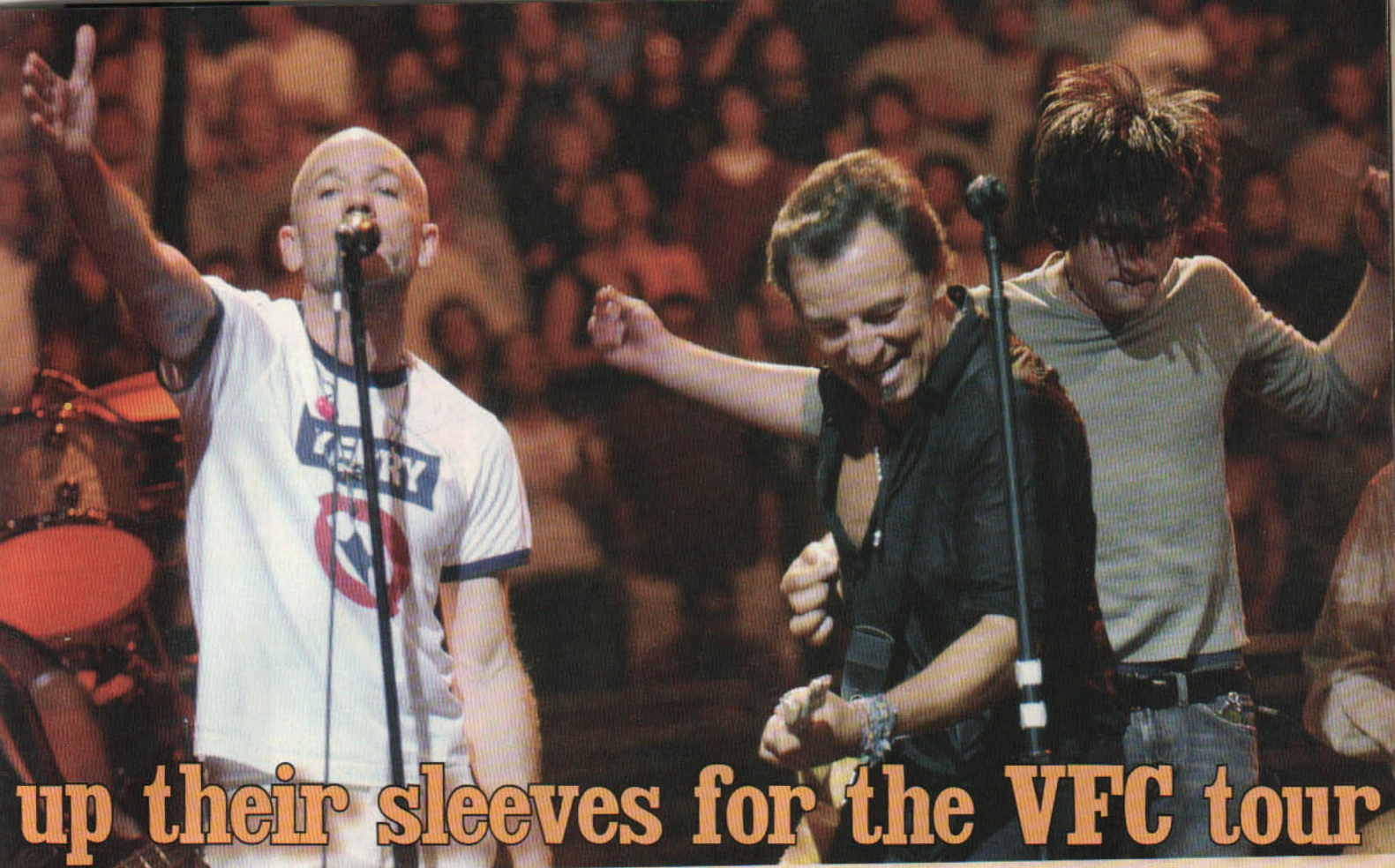
“Are you ready?”

For the first time in memory following the announcement of impending Springsteen concerts, many fans weren't sure.

When the details of October's Vote for Change tour were announced, it was a toss-up whether to be more surprised by the tour's political nature—that Springsteen was endorsing a candidate for President and playing to benefit his election effort—or the musical implications. In the last 25 years, only 1988's Human Rights Now! tour found Springsteen and the E Street Band on the road with opening acts. With R.E.M., Bright Eyes, and special guest John Fogerty on the VFC bill, whatever the excitement level for those artists, fans knew to expect a shorter set from Springsteen. Many imagined that the political message of the evening would reduce Bosstime even further.

As a result, some fans chose to sit this one out. Others had no choice, with the shows compressed into a two-week period and purposefully confined to the nation's capital and a handful of “swing states.” But for those who were lucky enough—or in some cases politically tolerant enough—to attend, it was a unique opportunity to catch an urgent and sprawl-free Springsteen set distilled to its essence, a particularly passionate performance with the kind of inspired covers sorely missed on recent tours.

By Christopher Phillips, Glenn Radecki, and Caryn Rose



up their sleeves for the VFC tour

While the E Street Band set may have been compressed, it was hard for anyone present to feel shortchanged. A two-hour set was longer than many were expecting, in the first place. Moreover, the concerts were short on rhetoric, long on collaboration, and musically rich from start to finish, with Springsteen's presence and influence felt throughout much of the evening. Perhaps because touring with other acts is a much rarer experience for Bruce than for most headline artists (the last opener on a Springsteen tour was John Wesley Harding, for two shows in '95), he was better able to consider the big picture to shape an evening of music effectively. The result felt closer to the Asbury Park holiday benefits than a paint-by-numbers arena show, with Springsteen playing generous host over seven nights not only to Fogerty, R.E.M., and Bright Eyes (with Conor Oberst, one of the best young singer-songwriters today and a revelation to many in the audience), but also the likes of Neil Young, Tracy Chapman, Patti Scialfa, Jackson Browne, and Eddie Vedder. As "Springsteen & Friends" shows go, those are some damn fine friends; the camaraderie among them was genuine and inspiring. It gave us a taste of what might have been, when Springsteen was moved to play with other artists in the early '90s—and even better, this time we didn't have to lose the E Street Band in order to get it.

The concerts' deviations from the norm started right from the beginning, as a guitar-free Springsteen and R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe walked out together to welcome the fans and

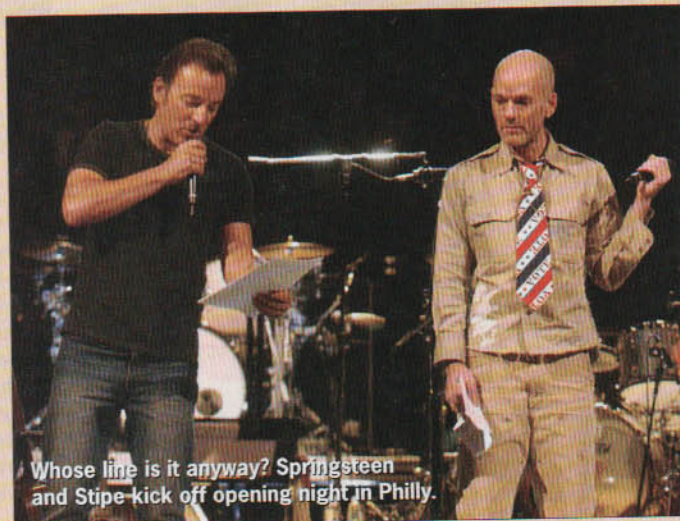
provide an introduction. Springsteen and Stipe—together? On the same stage? Sure enough, there they were, with a respectful yet cheerful chemistry just short of Martin and Lewis. Michael looked so excited you thought he was going to burst; his demeanor trumpeted "I am on stage with Bruce Springsteen" about as loudly as his white suit.

Each night, without fail, Bruce was quick to declare "an official No 'Broooce' Zone. I don't want to hear any Broooocing! We've got too many great musicians tonight. I will come out and get medieval on your ass!" The warning was generally well-heeded, with a few exceptions, including some rude fans in Cleveland during R.E.M.'s set. Stipe took it in stride, reminding the crowd, "Now what did he say earlier?" and later joking, "Am I being Brooooced?"

Prior to their joint introduction of Bright Eyes, Springsteen thanked everybody for "coming out tonight, supporting us, and raising your voice for a change in the direction of our country." He reminded the crowd that the show's roster was "part of a coalition of musicians" spread out over whatever the given state was that night, and Stipe listed the

other cities and Vote for Change shows going on at the same time. Bruce continued, "We are here tonight to fight for a government that is open, rational, forward-looking, and humane... and we will rock the house while doing so!" In Detroit, appropriately for the home of the MC5, he promised to "kick out the jams."

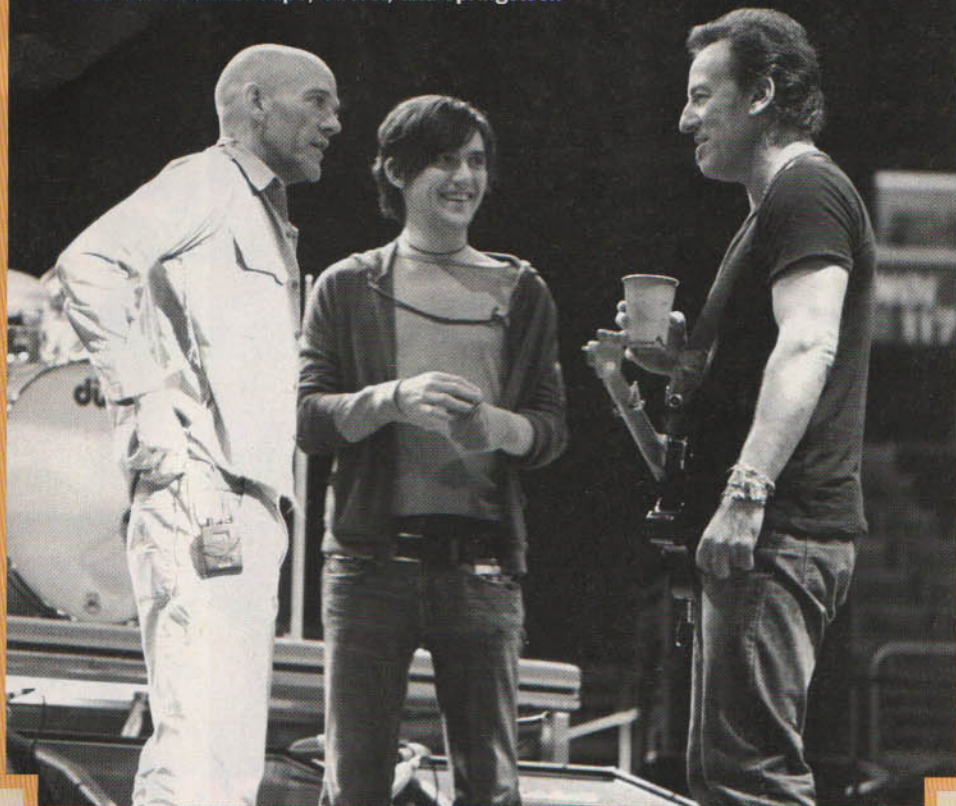
The scripted remarks were informal yet deliberate, aimed to set the tone for the evening and to ensure that the message and the purpose of the tour were kept front and center. Listing the other concerts taking place that same night reminded the audience that this show was part of something bigger that evening; this wasn't just a Springsteen show, it was a state-wide event.



Whose line is it anyway? Springsteen and Stipe kick off opening night in Philly.

DEBRA L. ROTHENBERG PHOTOS

Tres Generacions: Stipe, Oberst, and Springsteen



Still, Springsteen's set formed the cornerstone each night. With speechifying at a minimum, the tightly constructed set allowed for a distillation of music and message that kept political concerns at the fore through the songs themselves. Bruce didn't need to speak much during his set, aside from what he called "everybody's favorite part of the show, the public service announcement!" But with swing states being the "hook" of the tour, he did have specific messages for the various battlegrounds. In Cleveland, where the voter registration deadline was a mere two days after the show, he was more direct (not to mention prescient): "I can't overemphasize how important the state of Ohio is to the next election." In Orlando, Bruce was glad to be in "the Sunshine State... or as I like to call it, the scene of the crime!"

In Michigan, both Springsteen and Stipe were pointedly outspoken with facts and figures: Michael read from a list of statewide job-loss figures, and Bruce addressed the effects of both the war and the economy on the state: "Michigan has been particularly hard-hit; 140,000 manufacturing jobs gone, 7,500 citizens serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. We salute them and honor their service, and we want them home as soon as possible."

Between sets, the use of the video screens to show various VFC musicians speaking, openly and directly, about why they were participating served as a unifying touch. It was a simple way to keep the shows on topic and keep the audience focused, as well as give a larger platform to the cause—keeping the political message front and center, while allowing the performers the freedom to concentrate on rocking the house.

OPENING ACTS

Clearly, Bruce has never forgotten what it was like to be an opening band, because he went out of his way to be a good host and to make sure the other artists felt comfortable and were successful onstage (the "No Broooce Zone" at least gave them a fighting chance). Whether he was watching the other acts or performing with them, Bruce was visibly energized by these musicians. In all likelihood, the fanbase as a whole would riot if he started bringing out opening acts on tour on a regular basis, but there's no question that it enhanced the performance this time out.

While the tour had some one-offs—Tracy Chapman in Florida, Jackson Browne and Patti Scialfa in New Jersey, and a whole host of VFC artists converging in DC—Bright Eyes and R.E.M. formed the core of the supporting acts.

Bright Eyes

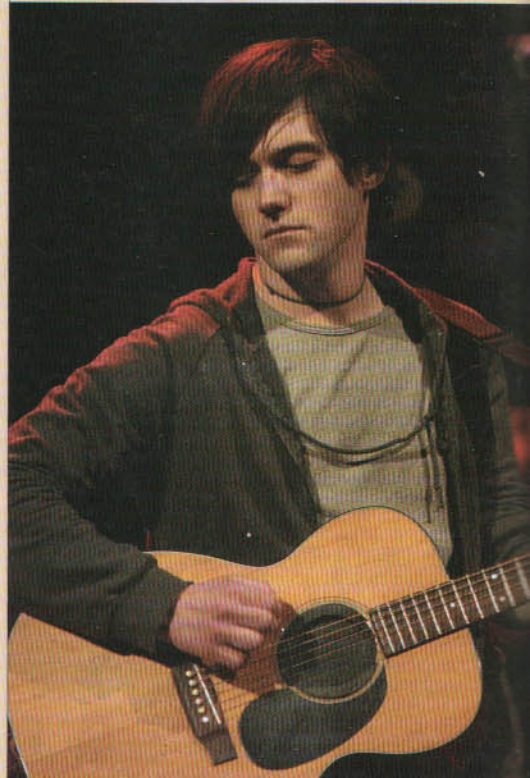
Conor Oberst drew the most unenviable slot in rock and roll since whoever opened for the Beatles at Shea Stadium. Nerves were an obvious factor, but he showed an overwhelming determination to hold his own—and he did. In his world, Oberst is a Springsteen-esque figure to his fans. Here, a large portion of the audience had never even heard of him or his band, and much of that group didn't have a lot of curiosity to find out. To them, even R.E.M. was nothing more than a barrier to Bruce being onstage. Philly's crowd was almost impenetrable; later crowds were friendlier, Oberst and his band more animated and confident after surviving the Philly trial-by-fire.

A big key to any acceptance for Bright Eyes was the introduction courtesy of Springsteen and Stipe; they didn't have to come out blind and face an audience looking at their watches and waiting for Boss Time. And when Bruce spoke of Conor as "someone whose record floored me when it came out," that seemed to prick up a few ears.

Bright Eyes is an ever-changing lineup of friends, and the band on this tour was a solid group of excellent musicians who held their own on that stage. The set itself was carefully constructed, Oberst drawing largely on unreleased songs that have been staples of his live shows over the past two years—shows that, by his own admission, were very politically driven. Add to that a sprinkling of other previously released, thematically relevant songs, and those listening carefully got an early dose of well-crafted songs that also spoke to the cause.

Bruce so clearly enjoyed Conor's participation—coaching him through the teleprompters at the encore, nodding encouragingly at him after he sang his line in "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding," and then gesturing him over to his mic to sing the chorus together. Oberst beamed, pogoing toward the back of the stage like Tigger, shaking the maracas for all he was worth.

And no one else on the tour got a commemorative jacket out of the deal! Springsteen surprised Oberst at his last show with a vintage jacket he found "in the wilds of St. Paul." Bruce has long had a penchant for odd gifts: in the '80s, he liked to celebrate "band anniversaries" onstage by bestowing major appliances: a portable washer/dryer for Danny Federici, a hair dryer for Max Weinberg. The presentation to Conor was complete with a rim-shot from Max, but this gift was given with less irony, as Bruce told the crowd, "Tonight is the last night that





Bright Eyes is gonna be on tour with us, we're gonna miss them very much. Let's hear it for Bright Eyes!"

R.E.M.

If Springsteen was "floored" by Bright Eyes' recent record, he's been "inspired... for the last 20 years" by R.E.M. Introducing the band, he maintained that they had drawn straws for the headlining set, and that the crowd would be getting "pearls before the swine," or "beauty before age tonight."

For years the Athens, GA group resisted crossing the barrier to becoming an arena rock band, but now they define what a great arena act should be. Supplemented by a trio of touring regulars (drummer Bill Dison, multi-instrumentalists Ken Stringfellow and Scott McCaughey), R.E.M. is Peter Buck, Mike Mills, and Michael Stipe. Someone in the Philly audience commented to his friends that Stipe moved like he was on ball bearings, and that description is perfectly apt. The charismatic frontman has come a long way from the days when his stage presence involved murmuring lyrics into the microphone while hanging off the stand precariously, hiding behind long blonde curls, wearing layer after layer of baggy, grey, thrift store clothing. Now, his performance is more Vegas showman than alternative rock icon, and it helped to engage this crowd—even those who were seemingly just counting the songs until Bruce was standing in front of them instead of this weird bald guy wearing a white suit and wiggling his ass in their faces.

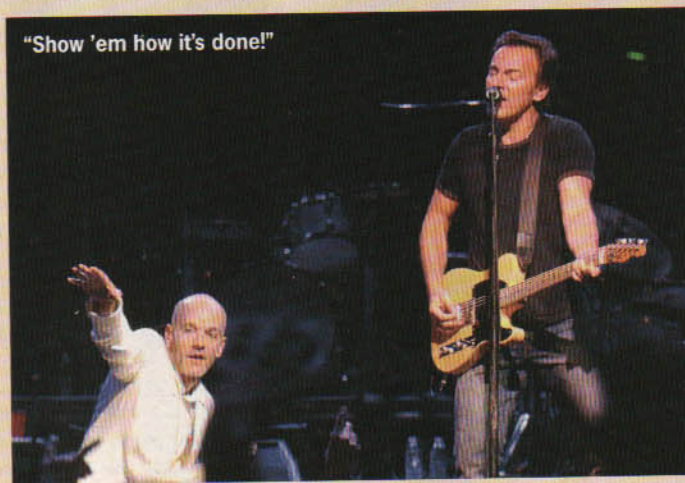
One night, Stipe sat down on the step in front of the runway, and we could see that his white shoes were actually black Doc Martens that he'd spray-painted white—but only as far up as he needed to. Anything covered by the trouser legs was still black. Another great Stipe moment: telling the true story about playing Detroit for the first time (in 1982) and having only eight people show up; the band stopped the show and took the audience out to dinner.

The structure of R.E.M.'s set remained basically the same, with one of the highlights each night being what Michael used to refer to as "Chestnut!"—a song from a very early album. In Philly it was "World Leader Pretend"; in Cleveland, "Life and How to Live It"; and in Detroit, "Exhuming McCarthy." Even old-time R.E.M. fans probably haven't heard the latter two played live more than a handful of times. While the band tried to keep their set as accessible as possible, the obvious political choices (in addition to "World Leader Pretend" and "Exhuming McCarthy") were "Bad Day," which is such a fun rocker it's easy to overlook the message, and the resonant, powerful "Final Straw," which the band released online last year to protest the war. The song also appears on the

band's new album, *Around the Sun*, for which they would begin touring immediately after *Vote for Change*.

At the first show in Philly, no one knew quite what to expect, so it was a thrill when Bruce came out to guest on "Man in the Moon." Watching Peter Buck's hands to make sure he had the changes, Bruce took a verse that let him goof on Elvis, and he even got hopping à la "Land of Hope and Dreams" on the chorus. In Cleveland, where Michael was feeling particularly garrulous, he winked at the crowd when an extra mic stand was brought out: "Wonder what that's for!" But it actually was a surprise, as Bruce came out to play and sing backup on "Bad Day." Michael exclaimed, "Show 'em how it's done!" When Bruce took the solo that night, the R.E.M. frontman parked himself in the best

"Show 'em how it's done!"



DEBRA L. ROTHENBERG PHOTOS

seat in the house, watching gleefully and commenting "I do love this job," when the song finished. Bruce hung around for "Man on the Moon," too, and from that point forward, two songs with R.E.M. would be standard.

In all, Springsteen played on three different R.E.M. songs with the band, including chestnut "Permanent Vacation" in Orlando. The band had other special guests of their own, as Neil Young appeared first with them in St. Paul for a smoldering "Country Feedback," their 1991 song living up to its name. Nils Lofgren put his own twist on the song when he joined R.E.M. at the following show in Orlando, providing a clear demonstration of how much an instrumental guest can add; it practically sounded like a different song. At that show, the last of the originally announced run and the band's last full set, Bruce called it "bittersweet": "I knew it was gonna be a pleasure," he said of sharing the stage with his VFC tourmates, "but it ended up being a thrill."

THE MAIN EVENT: THE FRONT HALF

As for thrills, the grin on Michael Stipe's face each night was big enough for the entire arena as he walked to the front of the stage and uttered, "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band." For him, this duty was obviously equal parts honor and delight.

It Came Out of the Sky Rocket Science

"My point of view about it has been pretty simple. I think that if you mislead the country, and you take the nation to war, and put our sons and our daughters on the line, and the basis you took the country to war on has been proven false... you lose your job. It's not rocket science! When you do that, you lose your job."

"The bottom line is that we should have a country where everyone is covered by some sort of health care... housing... where everyone can make a living wage that's going to tie them into the fabric of their nation and of their community, and of their society, and give people a stake in life. Without that, the country comes apart at the edges; it comes apart at its seams. So I think my interest is, in our own small way, making an effort to move the country in that direction as best as possible."

"I think you gotta be connected at the local level, at the state level, and the national level, and then at home in your own house—instilling the kinds of values that you want your kids and your family to grow up with."

—Bruce Springsteen, from the VFC tour video



October 2, 2004
Cleveland, OH

ANASTASIA PANTSIOS PHOTO

This introduction came close to 10:00 p.m. on October 1, more than two hours into the concert at the Wachovia Center, as the E Street Band appeared for the first time. Even as Bruce walked to the front of the stage, it remained unclear what he had in mind for the opening number. He had received the black 12-string Takamine acoustic guitar from guitar tech Kevin Buell moments earlier, suggesting that the familiar acoustic version of "Born in the U.S.A." might be opening the set.

Yet, as Bruce began to strum and his body turned, it became apparent that in addition to the acoustic guitar he was playing, he also had his famous 1953 Fender Esquire strapped to his back. He stepped forward, bent over in concentration, as his chiming chords washed over the arena. Focused solely on his strings, he disregarded the crowd's cheers and began a stunning version of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

While not immediately recognizable, a wash of cheers and applause came down as those present realized what they were hearing. Many stood stunned for almost three minutes as Bruce played an instrumental version of America's National Anthem that suggested anger, dissatisfaction, and—as importantly—patritism, too. At that time, Bruce effectively set the theme both for that night's show and the tour as a whole. He expressed the reason for his involvement in the tour with no words or slogans, his inspired playing speaking louder and more clearly than words ever could.

One of the primary functions of Bruce

choosing an acoustic song to open a show in recent years has been to defuse a situation in which the expectations were high. A recent example is the opening night at Giants Stadium in July 2003, when he used the acoustic version of "Born in the U.S.A." to good effect, not allowing anticipation to overwhelm the performance. While ostensibly still keeping that anticipation in check, this acoustic opener served not to defuse, but to ignite.

Immediately after the wordless "home of the brave," Bruce walked back to the drum riser and counted off. Max's bass and snare drums rattled the arena, synthesizers and piano blared a familiar riff, and the E Street Band started "Born in the U.S.A."—played at the beginning of a show for the first time since that song's namesake tour. The contrast with "The Star-

"The Star-Spangled Banner."





Spangled Banner" was as immediate as it was deliberate. The crowd, somewhat quieted by the acoustic opener, once again came to life. Bruce stepped to the microphone, and as he yelled "Born down in a dead man's town..." to the 20,000 in attendance, he began his argument. He was on stage to inform and persuade.

Straight out of the gate

Each night of the tour began this way: an almost venomous version of "Born in the U.S.A." following the National Anthem, just the beginning of one of the most concise and powerful opening salvos Springsteen has yet assembled for a live setting. Using some of his best-known songs allowed him to immediately capture and retain audience attention when it was most crucial. During this run of songs, the band moved quickly from one to the next. Truncating the trademark drum break at the end of "Born in the U.S.A.," dropping the extended audience chant in "Badlands," Bruce was clearly determined to make his message known to the audience and not lapse into excess. The quicker pace only increased the intensity of his playing.

Each song seemed more urgent than its predecessor: from the anger of "Born in the U.S.A." to the hope in "Badlands" to the unwavering commitment of "No Surrender" (and, more often than not, bringing to the run a present-day immediacy by including "Lonesome Day"), Bruce managed to include the entire spectrum of emotion he no doubt felt and wanted his audience to recognize. He still took special effort to include the crowd, calling out, "Join us!" each night for the "li, li, li" refrain in "No Surrender."

In Washington, DC, with so many other artists from the Vote for Change tour on the bill, Bruce and the band were forced to make a few cuts. Despite the shorter set, this opening run of songs (with the exception of "Lonesome Day") remained intact; it was too important to alter. While holding no surprises after the first show, the opening salvo had unparalleled intensity each night—arguably the most thematically important part of the set as well as the biggest highlight of Bruce's performance.

Wild cards & hard times

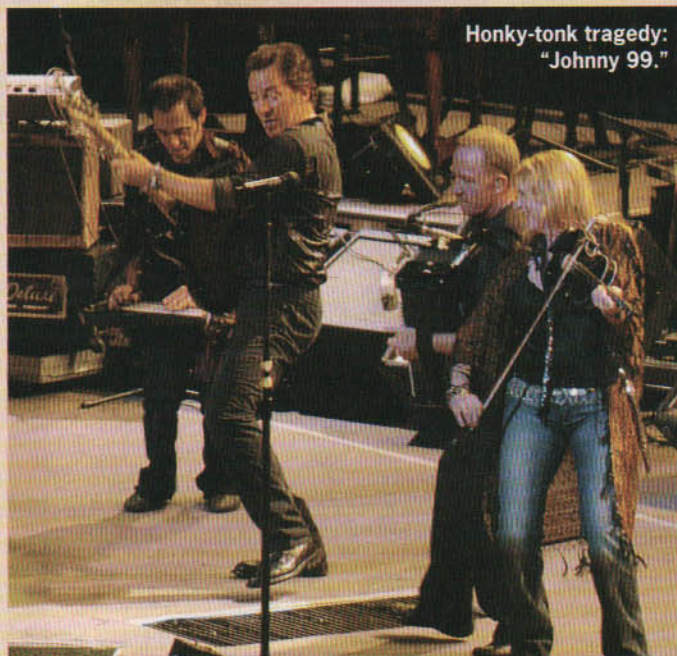
Following the opening blitz, a wild-card slot allowed for much of the tour's scant setlist variations from night to night. Philadelphia, always

a bastion of Springsteen's own "chestnuts," got the full-band "Lost in the Flood"—the only song from Springsteen's first two albums played at any show on the tour. Gasps from the audience could be heard as Roy and Soozie started the progressively building introduction. Undeniably a shock to hear so early in the set, the reason for its performance became clear as Bruce snarled the key lines that night, "Man, that ain't oil, that's blood" and "Have you thrown your senses to the war or did you lose them in the flood?" Even more heads turned during the instrumental break, as a fiery guitar solo was let loose upon the audience—not by Bruce, not by Nils, but by Steve Van Zandt, in a rare opportunity for him to exhibit his prowess on the guitar. A strong version of "Prove it All Night" in Orlando replaced "Lonesome Day" and provided an opportunity to showcase Clarence and Steve, as well as Bruce's own guitar work with a particularly riveting solo.

At Detroit's Cobo Arena, a smaller arena with excellent acoustics and no seats behind the stage, Bruce turned in a performance that was a notch or two above the previous shows. Following "No Surrender," the band went directly into "The Ties That Bind"; Clarence strolled to center stage and belted out an excellent solo, sounding as if he had been playing the song regularly on an extended tour. Following "Ties," Bruce immediately led the band into "Darkness on the Edge of Town." Bruce didn't hold back a thing in either his vocal delivery or guitar playing on "Darkness," six songs into the set. When he sang "I'll be on that hill with everything I've got," it was as if the Cobo Arena stage was that very hill. The inclusion of "Darkness" formed a truly symmetric mini-set as it echoed the anger found in "Born in the U.S.A.," giving Detroit the strongest opening run of the tour.

After the wild card slots, the front half of the set wrapped with "Johnny 99" and, more

often than not, "Youngstown." The pair formed a thematic stretch—especially with wild cards "The River" or "My Hometown" as lead-ins—about economic woes, working-class struggles, and desperate measures. Both also happened to be significantly rearranged from their album versions. "Youngstown," played in the same arrangement as in 1999-2000, lacked some of the fire of that tour; maybe it just suffered by comparison to the intensity of the opening, or perhaps it was because as the final notes of Nils' solo ended, the band simply stopped, leaving the end of the song devoid of energy, but what might have been a peak here fell flat most nights. While "Youngstown" only appeared at four of the seven shows (most appropriately, in Pennsylvania and Ohio), "Johnny 99" got a full workout every night, helping make up for this brilliant rearrangement's very late appearance on the *Rising* tour. With Danny on accordion, Garry Tallent on stand-up bass, Nils on slide, and of course Soozie Tyrell on fiddle, this country-fried rave-up offered that satisfying tension between music and lyrics, pitting its bleak narrative against a rousing hootenanny (at a certain point melting into a shuffle that evoked the Grateful Dead), and making the case for an electric *Nebraska*. Not the one that may be sitting in a vault somewhere, but the one they could make now.



ALAN CHITLIK PHOTO

SWING SETS

When Bruce Springsteen takes the stage, 12-string Takamine to the fore and the Esquire, present for duty, slung perpendicular across his back, the image is simultaneously that of troubadour and soldier, bard and warrior, minstrel and freedom fighter. As he began to play that majestic, fiery, and solemn version of "The Star-Spangled Banner," it was clear that, despite the *bonhomie* displayed earlier in the evening, Bruce Springsteen was pissed off, and here to stand and deliver.

More than ever before, the theme of the set drove the evening. It was more dominant, more critical, more concrete. Bruce wanted no mistakes in interpretation of his message this time; he was aiming for laser-sharp clarity, and he achieved it. The VFC setlist was a powerful parable, a moving song-cycle, a beautifully deliberate statement. And through these songs, he described his ultimate motivation for participating in the tour.

Sure, he talked about it a lot, he wrote about it for the *New York Times*, but at the end of the day, Bruce Springsteen is a songwriter; he's a storyteller. When the stakes are at their highest (as on this tour), he will always come back to that medium in which he excels. That's why the setlist was consistent each night. Even within the wild card slots, the choices were deliberate and matched the theme: "Lost in the Flood," "Darkness," "The River,"—the wild card slot represented the darkest side of the story, the shadow side of America. (Where was "Seeds"? It would have been perfect.)

Transitioning to the back half of the set, "The Promised Land" represented that combination of hope and faith that is an indelible part of the human experience. The song also provided a mission statement, the line "take this moment into my hands" resonating with Springsteen's choice to speak out. "The Rising" was there to remind people that he didn't forget—overlooking neither 9/11 nor the government's stated justification for going into war. "Because the Night" represented love and passion, "Mary's Place" joy and salvation, and "Born to Run" ended the set with the ultimate anthem of hope and liberation.

Understanding the setlist isn't so difficult if you look at the PSA. It's all there: fulfillment of promises, American identity, and "the country we carry in our hearts." Each of the songs in the set reinforced one or more of those themes. Bruce chose songs that spoke of hope and faith, of loyalty and promises fulfilled and unfulfilled, of joy and disappointment. It went from light to dark and then back to light again, a clear story arc meant to transport the audience on an emotional journey that described the American experience as Bruce saw it, and his hopes for the future.

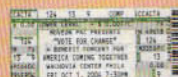
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|-----------------|----------|--------------|
| 1. STAR | 10/08/04 | 13. Because |
| 2. USA | | 14. Rising |
| 3. Bad | | 15. Mary's |
| 4. Prove It | | 16. BTR |
| 5. No Surrender | | |
| 6. My Hometown | | 17. Bad Moon |
| 7. S. 99 | | 18. Peace |
| 8. Youngstown | | 19. People |
| 9. Center | | |
| 10. Desa | | |
| 11. For You | | |
| 12. Proud | | |

September 27-29 Convention Hall Asbury Park, NJ

Notes: Three days of closed rehearsals with the E Street Band, plus John Fogerty on the 29th. In addition to the encore covers, Fogerty covers, and many of the tour staples, they ran through some that didn't make the final cut—including "Devils and Dust," a new song also rehearsed on the *Rising* tour and still not yet played live.

Rehearsed but not performed on tour: "Tenth Avenue Freeze-out," "Land of Hope and Dreams," "Chimes

of Freedom," "Devils and Dust," and "Held up Without a Gun"



October 1 Wachovia Center Philadelphia, PA

Opening acts: Bright Eyes, R.E.M.

Notes: On the setlist but not played: "Tenth Avenue Freeze-out," "Chimes of Freedom," "Land of Hope and Dreams." In the crowd: Eric Alterman, Bill Flanagan, Willie Nile, MTV's John Norris.

One-off: "Lost in the Flood"

Setlist: Man on the Moon (with R.E.M.)/The Star-Spangled Banner/Born in the U.S.A./Badlands/No Surrender/Lonesome Day/Lost in the Flood/Johnny 99/Youngstown/Centerfield (with Fogerty)/Deja Vu All Over Again (with Fogerty)/Fortunate Son (with Fogerty)/The Promised Land (with Fogerty)/The Rising/Because the Night (with Stipe)/Mary's Place/Born to Run (with Mills and Buck)/Proud Mary (with Fogerty)/What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love and Understanding (with all)/People Have the Power (with all)



October 2 Gund Arena Cleveland, OH

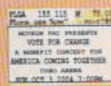
Opening acts: Bright Eyes, R.E.M.

Notes: In the crowd: Steve Buscemi, Dennis Kucinich, Marisa Tomei.

Setlist: Bad Day (with R.E.M.)/Man on the Moon (with R.E.M.)/The Star-Spangled Banner/Born in the U.S.A./Badlands/No Surrender/Lonesome Day/The River/Johnny 99/Youngstown/Centerfield (with Fogerty)/Deja Vu All Over Again (with Fogerty)/Fortunate Son (with Fogerty)/The Promised Land (with Fogerty)/The Rising/Because the Night (with Stipe)/Mary's Place/Born to Run (with Mills and Buck)/Bad Moon Rising (with Fogerty)/What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love and Understanding (with all)/People Have the Power (with all)

October 3 Cobo Arena Detroit, MI

Opening acts: Bright Eyes, R.E.M.



Notes: The smallest venue of the tour, holding 12,000. In the crowd: Bob Seger manager Ed "Punch" Andrews, former Detroit Wheels drummer Johnny "Bee" Badanjek, Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm.

Special guest: Dixie Chicks

One-off: "The Ties That Bind"

Setlist: Bad Day (with R.E.M.)/Man on the Moon (with R.E.M.)/The Star-Spangled Banner/Born in the U.S.A./Badlands/No Surrender/The Ties That Bind/Darkness on the Edge of Town/Johnny 99/Youngstown/Centerfield (with Fogerty)/Deja Vu All Over Again (with Fogerty)/Fortunate Son (with Fogerty)/The Promised Land (with Fogerty)/The Rising/Because the Night (with Stipe)/Mary's Place/Born to Run (with Mills and Buck)/Travelin' Band (with Fogerty)/What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love and Understanding (with all)/People Have the Power (with all, plus the Dixie Chicks)



October 5 Xcel Energy Center St. Paul, MN

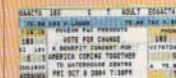
Opening acts: Bright Eyes, R.E.M.

Notes: At 21 songs, tied with East Rutherford for the longest E Street set of the tour. On the setlist, "For You" is crossed out and replaced by "The River."

Special guests: Neil and Pegi Young

One-offs: "Souls of the Departed," "All Along the Watchtower," "Rockin' in the Free World"

Setlist: Bad Day (with R.E.M.)/Man on the Moon (with R.E.M.)/The Star-Spangled Banner/Born in the U.S.A./Badlands/No Surrender/Lonesome Day/The River/Souls of the Departed (with Neil Young)/All Along the Watchtower (with Young)/Johnny 99/Centerfield (with Fogerty)/Deja Vu All Over Again (with Fogerty)/Fortunate Son (with Fogerty)/The Promised Land (with Fogerty)/The Rising/Because the Night (with Stipe)/Mary's Place/Born to Run (with Mills and Buck)/Proud Mary (with Fogerty)/Rockin' in the Free World (with R.E.M., Fogerty, Neil and Pegi Young)/What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love and Understanding (with all)/People Have the Power (with all)



October 8 TD Waterhouse Arena Orlando, FL

Opening acts: Tracy Chapman, R.E.M.

Notes: "We were worried about you up north," Springsteen told the crowd in light of the recent hurricanes. "We thought you were going to get blown away before we got here!" Chapman's sole set as a VFC artist included "Fast Car," "Give Me One Reason," and a cover of the Civil Rights anthem "A Change is Gonna Come."

One-offs: "Permanent Vacation" in R.E.M.'s set, "My Hometown," "Prove It All Night."

Setlist: Permanent Vacation (with R.E.M.)/Man on the Moon (with R.E.M.)/The Star-Spangled Banner/Born in the U.S.A./Badlands/Prove It All Night/No Surrender/My Hometown (with Tracy Chapman)/Johnny 99/Youngstown/Centerfield (with Fogerty)/Deja Vu All Over Again (with Fogerty)/Fortunate Son (with Fogerty)/The Promised Land (with Fogerty)/The Rising/Because the Night (with Stipe)/Mary's Place/Born to Run (with Mills and Buck)/Bad Moon Rising (with Fogerty)/What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love and Understanding

The Promise THE VFC PSA

We remain a land of great promise. But I think we need to move America towards the fulfillment of the promises that she's made to her citizens: economic justice; civil rights; protection of the environment; a living wage—so many people out there working two jobs that can't make ends meet—a real living wage; respect for others; and humility in exercising our power at home and around the world. These are not impossible ideals. They are achievable goals with strong leadership and the will of a vigilant and informed American people. These core issues of America's identity are what's at stake when we vote on November 2. And I believe that Senator Kerry and Senator Edwards understand these important issues and are prepared to help our country move forward.

I think they understand America is not always right—that's a fairytale for children.... But one thing America should always be is true. And it's in seeking her truth—both the good and the bad—that we find a deeper patriotism, that we find a more authentic experience as citizens, and we find the power that is embedded only in truth to change our world for the better. And that's how our soul, as a nation and a people, will be revealed. And it is what we're fighting for on November 2.

So we've got some work to do between now and Election Day. If you share our concerns, find the best way to express yourself. Roll up your sleeves, there's a job to get done. And remember, the country we carry in our hearts is waiting.

—Bruce Springsteen, 10/11/04

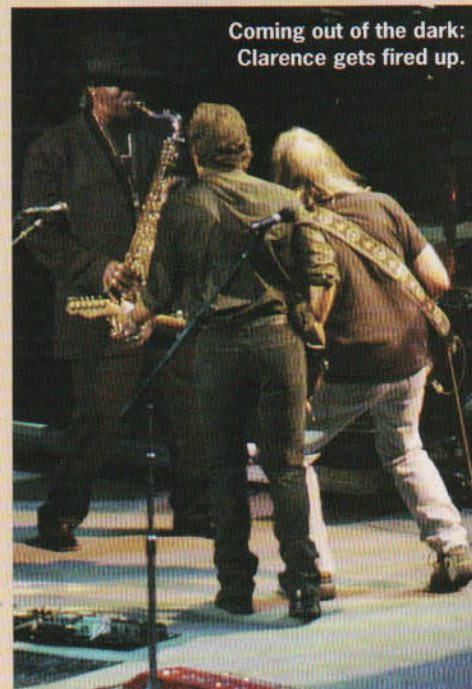
Flyin' the flannel

The wild cards never got wilder than when surprise guests turned up in the middle of this first half of the show—Neil Young in Minnesota, and his spiritual brother Eddie Vedder in New Jersey. Young, who had reportedly been beseeched to join the tour, wasn't an official Vote for Change artist, but he did hop unannounced from one bill to another as a "Canadian for Kerry" (as a button on his guitar strap stated). He played with Pearl Jam in Toledo, OH on October 2, and with Dave Matthews Band in Auburn Hills, MI on October 3. When he made his presence known in St. Paul on R.E.M.'s "Country Feedback," anticipation went through the roof for the summit that was sure to come. When it happened, we were practically transported to a different show. Neil's presence sent not only the performance into the stratosphere, but the song selection: "Souls of the Departed," "All Along the Watchtower," and "Rockin' in the Free World." All three were tour one-offs, and all were perfect thematic fits for the tour, even bringing in the spirit of Dylan and Hendrix.

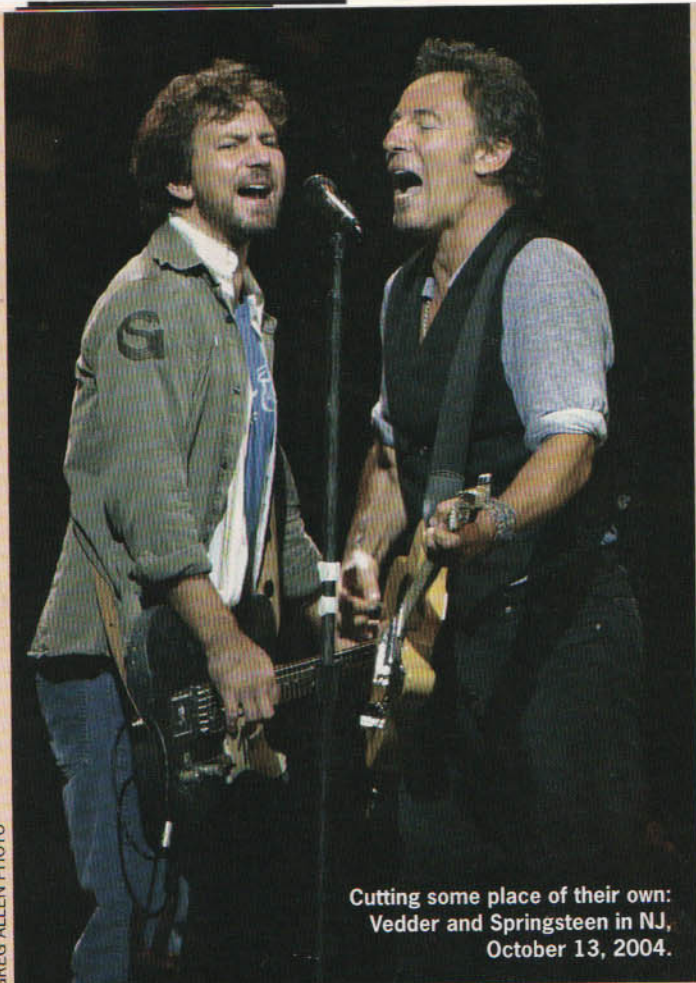
"Souls"—long thought by fans to be a natural for the *Rising* tour though, like "Johnny 99," it barely squeezed in at the end—became a Crazy Horse-style stomp, sounding even more ominous than usual. As Nils strapped on a harp and wailed away, Young took the lead and went head-to-head with Bruce on guitar. And if you thought that was a face-off, Springsteen and Young trading vocals and leads on "All Along the Watchtower" seemed to conjure the very elements. The band—Clarence Clemons in particular—was whipped into a frenzy as much as the crowd. The Big Man, shaking off whatever pains might have had him resting his weary bones for much of the tour, practically leapt into the fray with the guitar-slingers at center stage, blasting out wild, call-and-response sax riffs. As Neil and Bruce began to repeat "Two riders were approaching" at the song's climax, Young took the reins; there was a moment when he seemed to be creating an infinite loop with that line. They never did finish the thought—"and the wind began to howl"—because the music was taking care of that on its own.



"A kinder, gentler machine-gun hand..."



Coming out of the dark: Clarence gets fired up.



Cutting some place of their own:
Vedder and Springsteen in NJ,
October 13, 2004.

If Springsteen and his tourmates gave more than a minute of thought to the covers that would close each show, Young's "Rockin' in the Free World" must have come up for consideration along with "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding" and "People Have the Power." While Neil was in the house, it was an opportunity not to be missed—and sure enough, he and his wife Pegi came out and made the St. Paul finale a trifecta. We flashed back to the '95 Bridge Benefit, the last time Bruce and Neil shared the stage for "Free World," and while the Horse might have been in St. Paul only in spirit, having Fogerty, R.E.M. and the E Street Band rip it up as well was a fair trade-off to say the least.

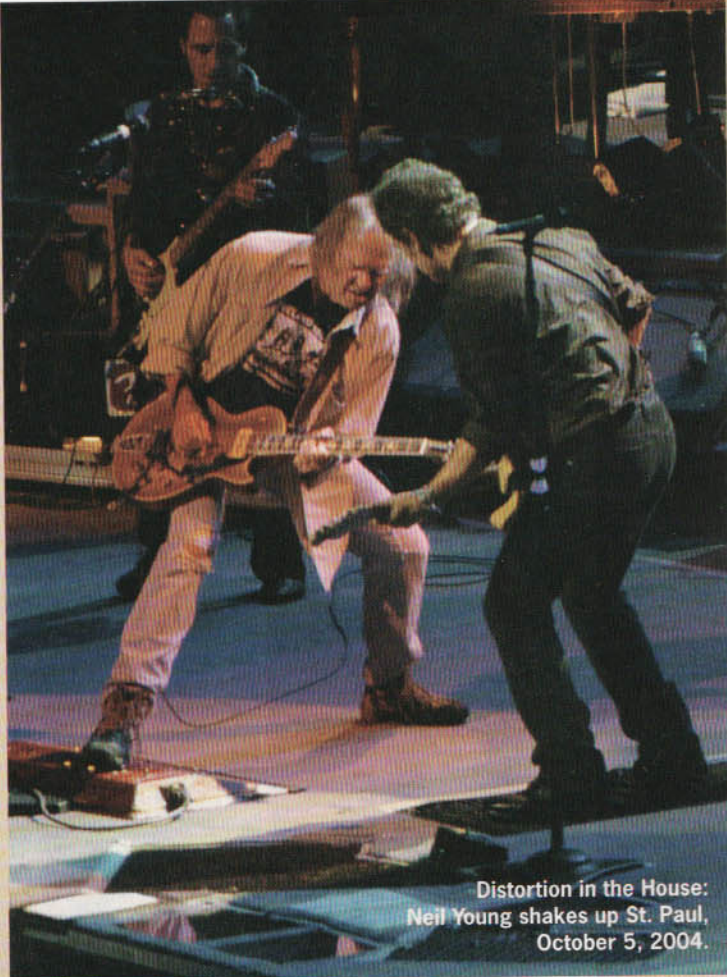
And then there was Vedder. Guests on Bruce's stage tend to go about their performances slightly differently. Some only get the opportunity to make minor contributions that are not critical to the song's performance. Those with major roles in a song can be intimidated and offer a mild or timid showing. Not Neil Young, of course, who blew in like a hurricane. Tracy Chapman's "My Hometown," on the other hand, was nice enough, but it'd be hard to say she threw herself into the performance. Others, like Michael Stipe, embrace the role with a combination of reverence and conviction, offering their own interpretation of Bruce's song. Eddie Vedder's performance at the October 13 New Jersey show could not be classified as any of the above. Vedder essentially performed as if he were Bruce Springsteen himself. His singing, his vocal inflections, his emotion matched Springsteen's exactly. When

he sang "cut someplace of our own with these drums and these guitars," he was channeling Bruce.

Similarly, when it came time for one of his own songs, "Better Man," Vedder performed it not as an Eddie Vedder song or as a Pearl Jam song. He sang and arranged it as if he were the leader of the E Street Band—which, in this case, he was. Rather than start the song on guitar (as when he plays the song with Pearl Jam), he assigned that part to the piano; he added a saxophone solo to close. For anyone who was there that night, it would be hard to forget all of CAA erupting into a genuine "Ed-die! Ed-die!" chant that wouldn't be out of place at a Pearl Jam show—except there, he would chide the crowd to please not do that. On this night, no one was declaring a "No 'Eddie' Zone."

THE MAIN EVENT: FOGERTY

While surprise appearances like Vedder's in the front half yielded singular highlights, the tour's most anticipated pairing came in the middle of the set each night like clockwork. The idea that John Fogerty would share the stage with Bruce Springsteen on the most politically themed tour either had ever embarked upon was something that most Vote for Change concertgoers were looking forward to, if not salivating over. Bruce had undeniably been inspired by Fogerty's songwriting—he spoke of it when he inducted Creedence Clearwater Revival into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in



Distortion in the House:
Neil Young shakes up St. Paul,
October 5, 2004.

1993. "Travelin' Band," "Rocking All Over the World," and "Run Through the Jungle" were just some of the CCR/Fogerty covers that have turned up in Bruce's setlist in the past. He has been a particular admirer of the political side of Fogerty's music, as seen in Bruce's performances of "Bad Moon Rising" at an anti-racism benefit in 1988 or the repeat performances of "Who'll Stop the Rain" at some of the most politically-themed concerts of Bruce's career, from the Los Angeles Sports Arena in August 1981 to Shea Stadium in October 2003.

So when Bruce introduced "Mr. John Fogerty, one of the great songwriters of our generation" in Philadelphia and Fogerty walked onto the stage with a guitar shaped like a baseball bat, it was difficult to characterize the moment as anything more than a powerful disappointment.

Was it Fogerty or Springsteen? Which artist surveyed the mighty catalogs of Creedence Clearwater Revival and John Fogerty—some of the greatest songs in the American rock 'n' roll repertoire—and settled on "Centerfield" to start with each night? Even if it was deemed necessary for Fogerty to begin his mini-set with a "hit" song, there were numerous alternatives. Some might say the show needed a light, hopeful "Waitin' on a Sunny Day" moment; others might have seen the song recast as a political metaphor, with lines about "new grass on the field" and "put me in, coach" as an optimistic Vote for Change vision. Those people would be stretching it. The ballpark classic engaged the crowd, but it diluted the show—a disappointing trade-off considering the possibilities.

DEBRA L. ROTHENBERG PHOTO



Despite some untapped potential, the mere fact that Springsteen and Fogerty were sharing the stage, backed by the E Street Band, was an event worth telling grandchildren about. And man, if only we'll seem as young and vital as Fogerty when we're old enough to have them—his voice having not diminished a notch in nearly 40 years, his hopping frame driving the songs as much as the rhythm section. The E Street Band were clearly getting off on the experience of playing these songs with Fogerty—Garry in particular was often beaming ear to ear.

Fogerty's solemn "Deja Vu (All Over Again)" was, remarkably, one of the few songs performed on the VFC stage (along with R.E.M.'s "Final Straw" and, arguably, a few from Bright Eyes) that was explicitly written about the cur-

rent political situation in America. As such—and from a voice that was raised during the Vietnam era to which the song flashes back—its inclusion was both timely and inevitable. Fogerty's generic dedication of the song to "families" seemed odd at first with no further explanation, but the lyrics surely completed the thought: "Day after day another Momma's crying/She's lost her precious child/To a war that has no end." The direct commentary on the Iraq war was an important part of the tour's big picture—one of the few issues that Bruce rarely addressed explicitly.

Things reached a peak in the latter half of the Fogerty mini-set, with a fast-paced, powerhouse "Fortunate Son" tapping into the mighty power of the E Street Band. Perhaps even more than the crowd, the song engaged the performers on stage—particularly Steve Van Zandt—to great effect. "Fortunate Son" brought Stevie alive like nothing else each night, and Fogerty put tremendous effort into each performance, even including a particularly biting lyric change of "I ain't no President's son." The three minutes of energy that "Fortunate Son" provided were certainly welcomed, yet as a hit-it-and-quit-it standalone performance it seemed out of place. Bruce and the E Street Band have always been able to transition quickly from one song to the next, and this tour highlighted that ability. One was left wondering why there was no song that segued into or out of "Fortunate Son." The performance would have been even better had it not been so obviously isolated. But with Fogerty in such fine voice, "Fortunate Son" was always the treat of the evening.

With a roadie appearing after "Fortunate Son" to switch microphone positions, Bruce would tell the audience that "if [Fogerty's] borrowing my band, he's gotta do one of my songs." The two shared verses on "The

Promised Land," with Fogerty getting noticeably more comfortable singing Bruce's song—his exhortation to "take a knife and cut this pain from my heart" becoming more self-assured—as the tour went along. "The Promised Land" must have made quite an impression on Fogerty, as he worked it into his own set following the Vote for Change tour (November 23 in Minneapolis)—the only Springsteen song Fogerty has played live. This performance did make us wish that we'd gotten to hear Bruce take a verse of "Fortunate Son" in kind. It was also a shame that there wasn't a way to include Vedder during "Fortunate Son" on October 13, as Pearl Jam's version (a tour staple since 2003) is mind-blowing.

With the encore opener, which brought Fogerty back to the stage each night, there was no such complaint—Bruce and John dueted nightly on a Creedence classic, trading verses and giving concertgoers (particularly repeat ones) an extra, unpredictable CCR fix to supplement the static main mini-set. Their back-and-forth on "Bad Moon Rising" was especially fun, and "Travelin' Band" was a tremendous highlight both times it was performed. On the final night of the tour in New Jersey, instead of the standard solitary song in the encore, Bruce said "We're gonna make you play a few more tonight"—they did not one, not two, but three.

Still, we were left wanting more. Perhaps "Who'll Stop the Rain," covered by both Bruce and R.E.M. in the past, was too obvious, but where, oh where, was "Green River"? The closest we got was soundcheck at Cobo, where fans waiting in the GA line could hear it through a shuttered door. A clear favorite of Bruce's, it was a song he took special effort to note when he inducted Creedence into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In Bruce's speech, he spoke of "a world that will never again be able to take



Mutual admiration in the Motor City, October 3, 2004.

DAVE MILLER PHOTO

The GRAND FINALE

October 11 • MCI Center • Washington, DC

This evening of music was destined to be different from the rest of the shows on the Vote for Change tour. For starters, it was to be broadcast live on the radio, internet, and cable television—the first time Springsteen and company would utilize all three media simultaneously. Second, it was the “grand finale” of the tour, a night when all the tour participants would gather on the same stage for what would surely be some once-in-a-lifetime collaborations. Third, because it was a high-profile political event as well as a concert, the stakes were a bit higher than at the other shows; indeed, the evening drew extra star power to both the stage and the audience and evoked more overtly political statements from several of the performers.

As start time drew near, the tension outside the MCI Center was palpable—volunteers from the Kerry campaign leafleted the arriving concertgoers as they exited the subway, and activists from both Bush and Kerry camps verbally jostled with each other and with passersby, some of whom had decked themselves out in anti-Bush regalia (there were far more politically-themed shirts in the crowd than at other VFC events). Inside, despite the stellar lineup, the arena was less than half full when the house lights came down promptly at 7 p.m. The video screens had not yet been turned on when Bruce Springsteen, Dave Matthews, Eddie Vedder, Dixie Chick Martie Maguire, and Michael Stipe entered stage left and began the evening’s proceedings with the by-now-

familiar VFC statement of purpose. They each made brief introductory remarks as usual, but this entire segment was unfortunately missed by the majority of attendees; Stipe’s comment that “we have all

“We are all Americans, and we have all been U.S. citizens longer than we have been singers, songwriters, pop stars, public figures, celebrities with a public voice. We are each of us placing our yardsigns in our front yards. Our front yard just happens to be a stage. And tonight it is this stage: thank you all for listening.” —Michael Stipe, October 11, 2004

been U.S. citizens longer than we have been...public figures,” clearly a response to criticism of the musicians’ political activism, was heard mostly by the folks at home.

The proceedings were expedited by a revolving stage that allowed for quick changeovers between artists, and the “open” stage setting (there was no backdrop) allowed the audience to get a peek at what was coming up next (as well as a clear view of the offstage area where some of the performers stood to watch each others’ sets).

While MCI patrons were given a chance to stretch their legs a bit between sets, Sundance Channel viewers were shown segments of the D.A. Pennebaker/Albert Maysles documentary *National Anthem* during

the breaks. These two documentarians, who are responsible for some of the genre’s most influential projects including *Don’t Look Back* (Pennebaker) and *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles), had not worked together since their late-’60s collaboration on *Monterey Pop*. The masters did not disappoint, capturing fascinating behind-the-scenes moments and choice

comments by tour participants, and assembling the footage into a concise whole that provided a solid structural framework for the overall presentation out of Washington.

The footage began airing half an hour before John Mellencamp took the stage in the nation’s capital, and each “live from DC” performance was interspersed with documentary segments featuring the next artist scheduled to appear. Especially engaging were Dixie Chicks Martie Maguire and Natalie Maines, who matter-of-factly discussed the aftermath of the latter’s infamous comments before a U.K. audience and the hostile reaction that followed.

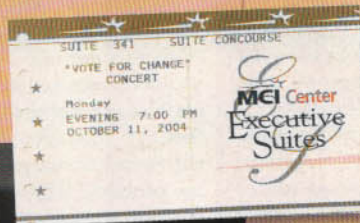
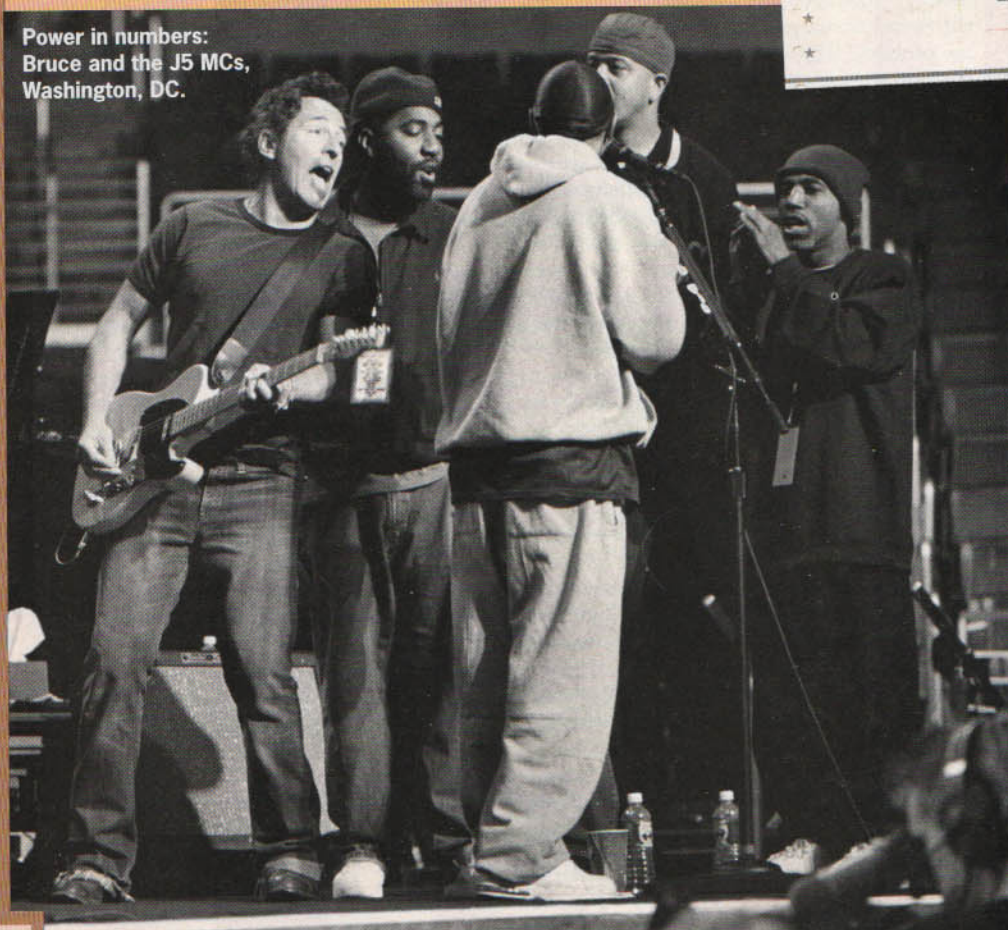
Springsteen fans were treated to footage of R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck working out “Born to Run” and commenting afterwards that he hoped that Bruce had not “changed keys downwards” over the years (he hadn’t); Springsteen himself was shown handwriting a set list that included (the yet-to-be-performed) “Devils and Dust.” The most memorable footage

for fans had to be the segment showing Springsteen rehearsing with John Fogerty. The sight of these two hall-of-famers matter-of-factly demonstrating the fondness and respect they have for one another was both moving and enlightening. A great moment reflecting on Creedence Clearwater Revival’s glory days—and their prodigious output in less than three years—had Bruce awestruck: “That’s incredible!”

The live portion of the program was produced and directed by Joel Gallen, who himself has quite an impressive resume, having performed these roles for countless television events, notably the 2001 *America: A Tribute to Heroes* special and the annual Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony.

First up was John Mellencamp and his band, who performed a brief, high-energy set that featured both hits and new material, concluding with “Pink Houses,” his indictment of class and privilege disguised as a rousing pop anthem. Other show highlights: R.E.M.’s set, which included Bruce’s appearance for “Man on the Moon” and a Vedder/Stipe duet on “Begin the Begin.” A typically intense Pearl Jam set included a not-so-impromptu appearance by Tim Robbins on X’s “New World” (he had performed with them throughout their VFC tour) and a quietly powerful semi-acoustic rendition of Dylan’s “Masters of War.” Also noteworthy were Bonnie Raitt, Keb’ Mo’ and Jackson Browne performing Little Steven’s “I Am a Patriot” (the songwriter did not join them), James Taylor and the Dixie Chicks performing his classic

Power in numbers:
Bruce and the J5 MCs,
Washington, DC.



"Sweet Baby James" (with Natalie Maines on lead vocals) and Jurassic 5, who got the crowd going with a rousing set including "Freedom," a message song directed at the powers that be.

But it was clear who the star attraction was—when Stipe introduced Springsteen midway through the R.E.M. set, Bruce drew by far the biggest cheers of the night. His appearance with the E Street Band did not happen until fairly late in the show, however, as the Dave Matthews Band immediately preceded them with a longwinded set that slowed the pace of the evening significantly. Fortunately, this did not deter the Springsteen faithful, who were primed and ready for another fix by the time the E Streeters hit the stage around 10 p.m.

It was a standard but abridged set, but the opportunity to see the legendary John Fogerty perform "Fortunate Son" before a Washington, DC audience was itself worth the price of admission. In addition, Bruce had come up with a new routine in keeping with the location of the show in the nation's capital: during "Mary's Place," he paced the stage as usual, gesticulating not only to the in-house crowd but also toward the TV cameras, and finally declaring "All this fuss about 'the swing voter'... All I wanna say is, it's October 11, what the hell are you waiting for?" Then, instead of bringing a "swing voter" up from the audience, he performed a mock healing for everyone at home—all in all, a classic Bruce "made-for-TV" moment if there ever was one.

The end of the night brought all the artists back out onto the stage for a rousing finale. Though all-star jams such as this may have become de rigueur, it was hard not to be impressed at the sight of such a variety of artists sharing the stage. The ensuing mic shortage led to some interesting juxtapositions onstage, including Patti Scialfa sharing a mic with some of the J5.

It was a long evening of music, and the show and its participants were not as "loose" as on other nights due to the live broadcast. However, despite time restrictions and a couple of overlong performances, it was a stellar evening for music fans—in the arena, or at home.

—Lisa Iannucci

Opening acts: John Mellencamp, Kenny "Babyface" Edmonds, Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, Keb' Mo', Jurassic 5, R.E.M., Pearl Jam, James Taylor, Dixie Chicks, Dave Matthews Band

Notes: Before his P.S.A., Springsteen sent "a prayer out to Christopher Reeve, who passed away recently. He was a real fighter—a fighter and a friend." "Peace, Love and Understanding" featured Fogerty and R.E.M. as usual, plus Dixie Chicks, Matthews, and Vedder. "People Have the Power" added Browne, Babyface, Jurassic 5, Taylor, Mellencamp, Keb' Mo, and Raitt. In the crowd: Howard Dean, Ethan Hawke, Carl Lewis, Maureen Orth, Robert Redford, Tim Robbins, Tim Russert, Meg Ryan, Susan Sarandon, Ben Stiller.

Setlist: Man on the Moon (with R.E.M.)/The Star-Spangled Banner/Born in the U.S.A./Badlands/No Surrender/Deja Vu All Over Again (with Fogerty)/Fortunate Son (with Fogerty)/Because the Night (with Stipe)/Mary's Place/Born to Run (with Mills and Buck)/(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding (with many)/People Have the Power (with all)

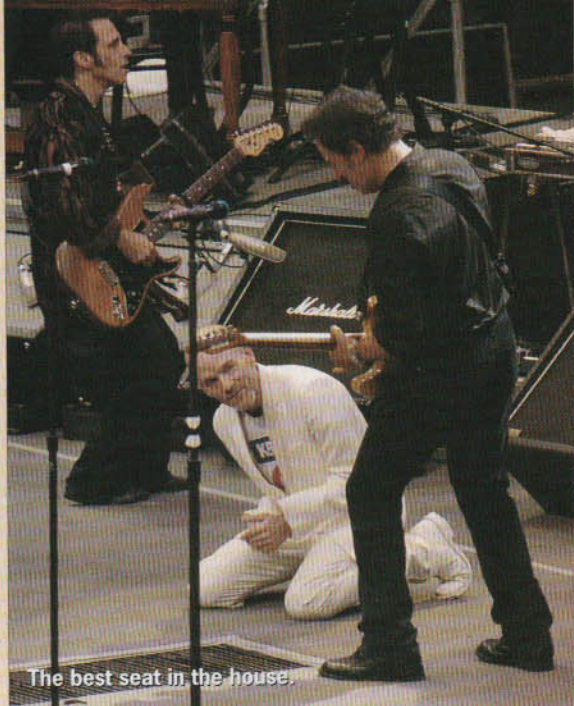
them up on their eloquent invitation that "if you get lost, come on home to Green River." On the setlist in New Jersey but replaced by "Proud Mary," "Green River" never saw public performance on the tour.

In fairness, as of the Vote for Change tour, Fogerty hadn't played a song like "Run Through the Jungle" since Creedence split up in 1972. As spoiled as Springsteen fans get about such things, it's hard to expect a guy to play a song he hasn't revisited in 30 years. And admittedly, this is the equivalent of complaining that Bruce didn't play "Rosalita" or "Thunder Road." Considering the number of Top 40 hits to Fogerty's name—17 with Creedence, five as a solo artist (of which, believe it or not, "Centerfield" wasn't one; it only went to #44)—it'd be tough to get complete satisfaction in a five-song shot. We'll have to hope for an extended reunion down the road.

THE MAIN EVENT: THE BACK HALF

The divided structure of his set required Bruce to use a second "opening" song once John Fogerty left the stage. Bruce opted for "The Rising" each night, a performance of one of his best that was consistently solid, yet strangely unspectacular. Like "Youngstown," it seemed slightly drained of some vitality out of its original tour context—highlighting by contrast the flexibility of songs like "Badlands" and "No Surrender," and even "Lonesome Day," which can be repositioned and reworked seemingly ad infinitum to create new meanings. With so many such highlights in the opening part of the show, the latter portion of Springsteen's Vote for Change set could not possibly top it. That didn't preclude excellent performances from the post-Fogerty section, as Bruce welcomed more special guests to the stage, reveled in ridiculous shtick, and gave his guitar a real workout.

Each night following "The Rising," we got a set highlight that could have only happened on this tour, as Bruce welcomed Michael Stipe to the stage to sing "Because the Night." With Stipe a well-known devotee of Patti Smith, it was a highly appropriate selection. He knows "Because the Night" almost as well as Bruce does—okay, he knows Patti's version, but it's a natural for him. Stipe represented himself beautifully, inhabiting the song and singing with power and passion. And knowing Smith's take on "Because the Night" was key: for the first time in performance, in a move obviously inspired by Stipe's participation, Springsteen sang Smith's lyrics. Deviating from Bruce's standard "guest" format in which Bruce sings the first verse of a song and the guest sings the second, Bruce had Stipe start the song each night. Stipe turned in a consistently excellent, committed performance, rivaled only by Bruce's intense solos during the song. Bruce had not lost a step from when he was performing "Because the Night" regularly at the end of the Rising tour. Meanwhile, Stipe coaxed and cheered Bruce during the guitar solo and



The best seat in the house.

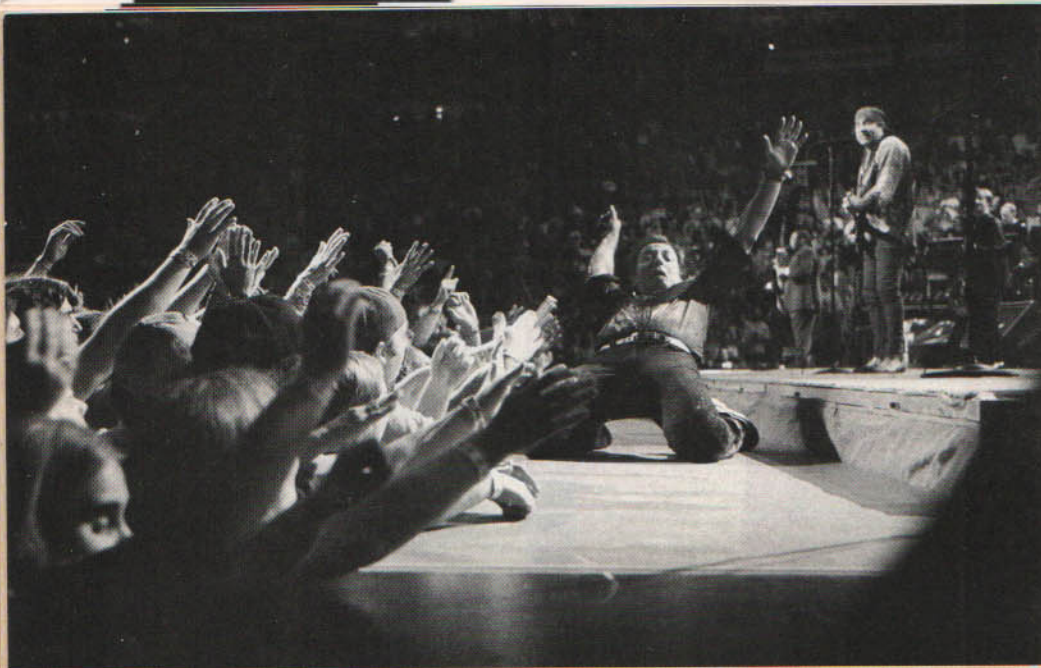
engaged the crowd as well. Who wouldn't have wanted to park themselves on the stage right in front of Bruce and watch, dumbfounded, as he peeled off blistering solo after blistering solo? Michael seems completely unselfconscious; he's pleased as punch to be up on that stage and he doesn't care who knows it. The give and take between the two of them during Bruce's solo was a joy to watch. Thematically the song was far less relevant than some of the alternatives Bruce had, yet he kept the song in the abbreviated set performed at the Washington, DC show—a testament to his opinion of Stipe's performance.

With Jackson Browne replacing R.E.M. at the final show of the tour in New Jersey, the setlist was bound to change. Sure enough, inviting Browne to the stage in the "Because the Night" slot, Bruce pointed to the piano as Roy Bittan began playing the chords of "Racing in the Street." Browne seemed to struggle with the phrasing of the lyrics at times, but it was a magical duet nonetheless. Roy gave a distinguished and majestic performance, for one of his few moments in the spotlight during the tour.

Halliburton! Halliburton!...

"Mary's Place" becomes bloated live. It goes on too long (despite no band introductions, the song still stretched to thirteen minutes each night). The "Are you ready?" chants are excessive. Yet, the crowd loves it. Each night when the familiar piano and violin introduction to the song started, a cheer went up. Many observers posited at the end of the Rising tour that we would never lose "Mary's Place," that it would take the place of the 18-minute "Tenth Avenue Freeze-out" as the extended showpiece. And it's clear why, especially if you were at the Christmas shows in 2003: Bruce likes the idea of himself as the smooth soul singer, working that stage back and forth. He consistently gets excellent participation from the audience on this one, and yet he looks like he's having the most fun—like he enjoys the knee slides

ALAN CHITLIK PHOTOS



DANNY CLINCH PHOTO

even more than the wide-eyed recipients of his sweaty self on the other end of the runway.

Even more than "Tenth Avenue" or "Light of Day," "Mary's Place" provides a perfect context in which he can testify, pontificate, or even just be goofy—and it didn't get much goofier than the ye-shall-be-healed piece of theater in the middle of the song. Bruce proclaimed that "if you're swinging, if you're swooping, if you're swaying, if you're sweeping, or if you just can't make up your mind...or if you're wearing a bow tie, you can be saved!" Each night, Bruce, er, "managed" to find someone in the front of the pit wearing a suit and bow tie—the volunteer was indeed soon "saved" and would proclaim, "I'm switching!" It was a fairly cringe-worthy bit, even judged on a generous scale given Bruce's history of shtick. But this bow-tie fella's track record in such matters at least made this historically remarkable: he was none other than Jim McDuffie, a.k.a. Jim the Dancing Bear from a recurring onstage bit in the '80s. ("Relax, folks," Bruce would tell the crowd, "he's completely docile.")

In Washington, DC, Springsteen tweaked the "Mary's Place" conversion a bit for the home viewer: "Tonight, I'm not speaking just to the folks in the auditorium, but I'm speaking to all you folks at home tuned in through the miracle of television!" Continuing in his revivalist preacher vein, he offered salvation: "If you want to even temporarily be released from the

burdens of Republicanism, then listen to me. I want all you folks at home, I want you to get up off your couch now. C'mon, I want you up off your couch. And I want you to take that remote control, and I want you to turn that television volume all the way up, until the walls are rattling. And I want you to come closer to the TV, and I want you... I want you... I want you to take off all your clothes! And I want you to put one hand on the television set, and I want you to say 'Halliburton' three times real fast! Let the healing begin! Now go to your window, throw that window open, and tell all your neighbors that a change is coming!"

Given those ridiculous proclamations, Bruce managed a very quick change of tone as he dove into a detailed "Public Service Announcement" directly after "Mary's Place" each night [see sidebar, page 23]. Borrowing a powerful closing line from his own *New York Times* op-ed piece ("Chords for Change," August 5, 2004), it was a heartfelt case for a change in the country's direction, which managed to be succinct while capturing the complexity of patriotism, dissent, and his view of the American experience.

The P.S.A. was a rousing, hopeful call for something better, and perhaps only one song in Springsteen's canon could have built on that speech with just the right balance of clear-eyed determination, optimism in the face of great odds, and thrilling momentum. Many of Bruce's old songs, particularly those performed often, have aged; "Born to Run" consistently refuses to do so. Each night, Bruce would remind the audience that "the country we carry in our hearts is waiting," and count off "One! Two!" The houselights went up, and the band slammed into another excellent version of the song.

With the show now building to its finale, it was the rest of R.E.M.'s turn to capture a little Bosstime glory. Peter Buck and Mike Mills came out each night for this final song of the main set. In Philly, it was charming to see these two world-class musicians—who, at one point in their career, sold more records than Bruce did—looking shell-shocked to be onstage, playing "Born to Run" with Bruce Springsteen and

The GRANDER FINALE

October 13
Continental Airlines Arena
E. Rutherford, NJ

For anyone who thought that the October 13 concert was just an afterthought... well, it was an afterthought, literally—a late addition to the itinerary when New Jersey oddly enough began to look like a swing state. But if you thought it would be somehow anticlimactic following the official VFC finale in DC, you were in for surprise. Rather than winding down, this homecoming show became one last chance for Springsteen to let out all the energy he accumulated during the tour. The overhauled opening slots offered a good indicator that this night would be different: with Bright Eyes gone after St. Paul and R.E.M. off to their own tour, Patti Scialfa and Jackson Browne would open the show for the first and only time. While that opened the door for new collaborations—and another unbilled one came walking through as well—Springsteen didn't have to share the stage with a dozen other performers. For Springsteen fans, the true finale happened not in Washington, DC, but two days later in the great state of New Jersey.

The GA ticketholders were let into the building while Scialfa was still soundchecking, her husband watching from the drum riser. While Patti and her band had played a number of gigs this summer and fall, from national TV broadcasts to club and theater shows, this arena would hold their largest in-house audience by far. When the lights went down for the start of the show, Patti, Soozie and the rest of her band were assembled onstage, and clearly raring to go. Bruce walked out, piece of paper in hand, ready to introduce them—but they started playing the first number, and so he retreated quickly, shaking his head and laughing as he went. Springsteen ambled over to stage right, hiding himself behind the monitor at the very far end of the runway, presumably not wanting to be a distraction during his wife's set—the only giveaway being his extended arm, replete with friendship bracelets, sticking out. A few songs later, that arm was gone—because Bruce had strolled out into the pit to watch the show. Unfortunately, too many audience members didn't consider that he was there to watch his wife, instead taking this as an opportunity to accost the man—who was



And the healing has begun:
Jim McDuffie, saved again.



ushered out by security when it became obvious that he wouldn't be allowed to watch the show in peace. Soon enough, Springsteen was onstage for all to see, joining Scialfa for the same two songs he guested on several times during her September tour [see page 9].

Patti had a chance to speak her own mind regarding the election: "They talk about the 'mom vote' and how we'll vote because of how we feel about our children's safety. I'm a mother of three, and I hope all women vote from conviction and courage and not from fear."

Jackson Browne also kept an eye on the topical, of course, with songs like "For America," "Lives in the Balance" and "How Long." While many expected a guest appearance during his set, most of us weren't expecting it to be Steve Van Zandt, invited onstage to sing "I Am a Patriot"—finally. Considering the recurrence of the song at Vote for Change events (in addition to Browne's previous performances with Bonnie Raitt and Keb' Mo', Vedder had incorporated "I Am a Patriot" into Pearl Jam's headline set), not to mention how long it's been since Steve has performed the song himself, this was a long time coming. Browne's version of the Van Zandt song appeared, with "How Long," on his 1989 album *World in Motion*; while it is certainly heartfelt, the addition of the song's author restored its original power and energy. Bruce joining Jackson for "Running on Empty" similarly electrified the house.

The collaboration that had arguably the greatest impact on the night was from the one performer not on the bill: Eddie Vedder, who trekked up from DC for a little more Bosstime. Pearl Jam often don't get the attention and respect they deserve—and while their station has been partly self-imposed, many fans consider it one of the great injustices in rock 'n' roll today. Suffering (much like Springsteen did) from too-much-too-soon media attention, the band downscaled to survive and deliberately chose to go from world domination to quasi-cult status. Most people stopped with the first or second album and have tended to judge the band based on superficial media overexposure or radio hits, when the truth is that Pearl Jam are also in the category of Great American Rock Bands. They're all that's left of the great Seattle media hype known as "grunge" (which only happened because of a concentration of fantastic bands in the same area code).

There had been whispers and then full-blown rumors, all of which were confirmed when Vedder strolled through the GA pit during Patti's set and headed backstage. (When he came back out to watch Jackson Browne's set from the pit, Vedder, at least, was left alone.) As for the E Street Band set, the most anyone expected was a "My Hometown" guest spot—so to see him stride onstage early on, guitar in hand, was a thrill. However, that was



Browne, Fogerty, Vedder, and Springsteen, pledging their love... of country. October 13, 2004.

nothing compared to the actual performance, with a three-song stretch: "No Surrender," "Darkness," and finally "Better Man," with Springsteen singing a Pearl Jam song for the first time.

Why "Better Man"? To those who knew their Pearl Jam history, it was the obvious—practically the only possible—choice. It was the first song Vedder wrote, and it never leaves the Pearl Jam setlist; when Ed (who is practically a poster boy for the Who's fan club) performed with his ultimate idol, Pete Townshend, and Townshend sang a Pearl Jam song for the first time, it was "Better Man." It can be sad or triumphant, poignant or searing, rocking or improvisational, but it is the Pearl Jam song that will never disappear completely from the setlist, because it is Vedder's doppelgänger. But on this night, Eddie explained: "Bruce asked me to sing this... and, well, he's the Boss." And when Clarence came in at the end of the song for a sax solo, worlds collided.

With Michael Stipe absent for the only time on this tour, something had to replace "Because the Night." And while that duet—not to mention Vedder's contributions this very night—set a high standard, it's hard to argue that Jackson Browne's inclusion on "Racing in the Street" didn't blow the entire arena away. It was a perfect choice, completely suiting Browne's voice and bringing an additional level of poignant anguish to the song. The performance was complete with a brilliant coda from Roy that should go down in history as at least semi-legendary.

Instead of his usual single to lead off the encore, John Fogerty took a victory lap, touching three bases with "Proud Mary," "Bad Moon Rising," and

"Travelin' Band" before heading for home. At the end of the show, for the finale's finale, Vedder led the charge on "People Have the Power." To be fair, the latter song has been in his repertoire since the last election, but in New Jersey, Vedder owned that performance. Not bad, on the Boss' home turf.

Opening acts: Patti Scialfa, Jackson Browne

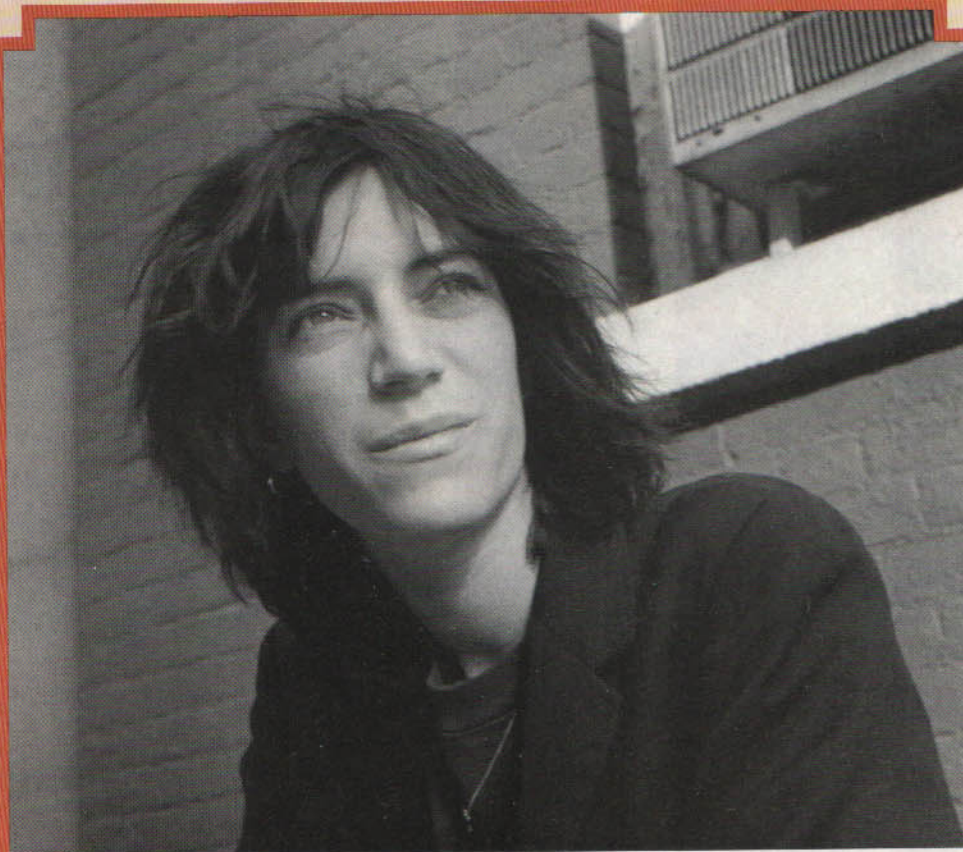
Notes: The only VFC show at which Springsteen played in all three sets. An extended encore with three CCR songs brings the total song-count to 21, matching St. Paul for longest E Street set of the tour. On the setlist but not played: "Green River," replaced by "Proud Mary." In the crowd: Jesse Malin, Willie Nile.

Special guest: Eddie Vedder

One-offs: "As Long As I (Can Be With You)" and "Love (Stand Up)" in Scialfa's set, "Running on Empty" in Browne's set, "Better Man," "Racing in the Street."

Setlist: As Long As I (Can Be With You) (with Scialfa)/Love (Stand Up) (with Scialfa)/Running on Empty (with Browne)/The Star-Spangled Banner/Born in the U.S.A./Badlands/Lonesome Day/No Surrender (with Vedder)/Darkness on the Edge of Town (with Vedder)/Better Man (with Vedder)/Johnny 99/Centerfield (with Fogerty)/Deja Vu All Over Again (with Fogerty)/Fortunate Son (with Fogerty)/The Promised Land (with Fogerty)/The Rising/Racing in the Street (with Browne)/Mary's Place/Born to Run/Proud Mary (with Fogerty)/Bad Moon Rising (with Fogerty)/Travelin' Band (with Fogerty)/What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love and Understanding (with all)/People Have the Power (with all)





THE SPIRIT OF PATTI SMITH

In Cleveland, a particularly chatty Michael Stipe had a message for the audience from his friend Patti Smith: "I'm really bad with dates, but she's really, really good with them, and she wanted me to remind everyone that today was Gandhi's birthday." It was a brief but lovely moment, not only paying tribute to peace, love, and understanding, but giving recognition to a songwriter whose work was an integral part of these concerts though she was rarely mentioned by name. Patti Smith may not have been part of the Vote for Change tour, but her spirit was invoked nightly in "Because the Night" and the unifying, climactic "People Have the Power."

Stipe, famously a Smith devotee, is the most obvious tie. For years, he told the story of the first time he heard Smith's *Horses* album—how he sat up all night listening to the record, over and over again, entranced. R.E.M. was at the height of their fame when Patti made her comeback in 1995, and the two singers struck up a friendship. Michael accompanied her on tour when she opened for Bob Dylan later that year, and he soon published a book of photographs called *Two Times Intro: On the Road with Patti Smith*. Even Peter Buck has gone on record that seeing her perform in Atlanta in the '70s changed his life. Patti sang on R.E.M.'s "E-Bow the Letter" (1996), and most recently, she gave the band the title "Final Straw" for a new ballad they played nightly on this tour.

And then there's the Springsteen connection. His first live performance of "Because the Night" was with Patti Smith at one of her shows, at CBGB on December 30, 1977. While working on the *Darkness on the Edge of Town* album at the Record Plant that year, engineer Jimmy Iovine was producing Smith's *Easter* in the same building. With no plans to include "Because the Night" on *Darkness*, Iovine convinced Springsteen to let her record the song. "If she can do it, she can have it," Bruce said. Given the demo, Smith finished the lyric (dramatically different from what Springsteen would sing live in 1978 and beyond); her rendering soon became a hit single, reaching #13 in the spring of '78. If Michael Stipe was going to sing any song in the Springsteen catalog, it would be "Because the Night"—and finally, Bruce sang Patti Smith's raw and passionate version.

The show closer, "People Have the Power," was co-written by Patti with her husband, the late Fred "Sonic" Smith, of Detroit's legendary MC5. Written while they were living in Detroit, the song was inspired by a Diego Rivera mural at the Detroit Institute of Arts; it was the opening track of *Dream Of Life*, her first record after the Patti Smith Group broke up in 1979. In 2001, R.E.M. used "People Have the Power" as a collaborative number when they shared a stage with Pearl Jam at a Seattle benefit show, so when it turned up in the pre-tour Convention Hall rehearsal setlists, it was easy to imagine what role it would play in the VFC shows. With all due respect to Nick Lowe, a more fitting anthem for these shows could not be found: "the people / have the power / to redeem / the work of fools" pretty much sums up the stated philosophy behind the Vote for Change movement, and Smith's song provided one of the most electrifying and memorable moments of the tour each night.

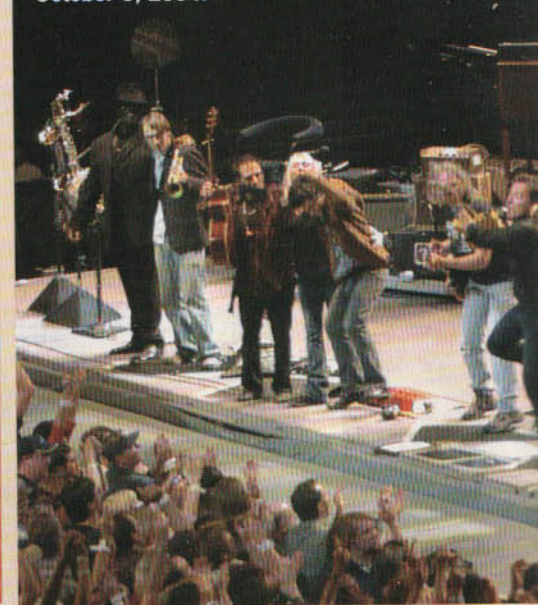
the E Street Band, Buck watching Stevie's hand closely for the changes. By Cleveland, they just rocked out and had fun, clearly loving every second on stage during the song. It's refreshing to see that, even for big-time rock stars, moments that inspire and excite them still exist. Bruce was particularly assisted by Mills, who would join in at Bruce's microphone for the final "whoa-whoa-whoa" each night, sporting a massive grin. And for those who wondered why the R.E.M. guitarist wasn't sharing anyone's microphone, Peter Buck doesn't sing—ever. Not even on "Born to Run."

THE ENCORES

Highlights like Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World" and the rotating Fogerty slot (especially the final show's CCR three-fer) brought some unpredictability to the encores, but the nightly staples provided a solid foundation with a united front. With multiple artists on the bill and the clearly stated goals of the tour, it was a foregone conclusion that each night's show would end with all of the artists on stage singing together. Both "Land of Hope and Dreams" and "Chimes of Freedom" had been rehearsed and seemed likely candidates. Instead, a pair of covers made the finale neutral turf, fully and appropriately inclusive: Nick Lowe's "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding" and Patti Smith's "People Have the Power."

They're both fantastic, ringing anthems with positive, non-partisan messages, songs that have stood the test of time—and in the case of "Peace, Love and Understanding," the test of repeated listening. Who sent out the memo that this was the protest song of the year? We'd bet Nick Lowe isn't minding, and we in the crowd weren't either, but it's curious that the song has been covered recently by everyone from Audioslave to Steve Earle to A Perfect Circle to the Wallflowers (okay, they

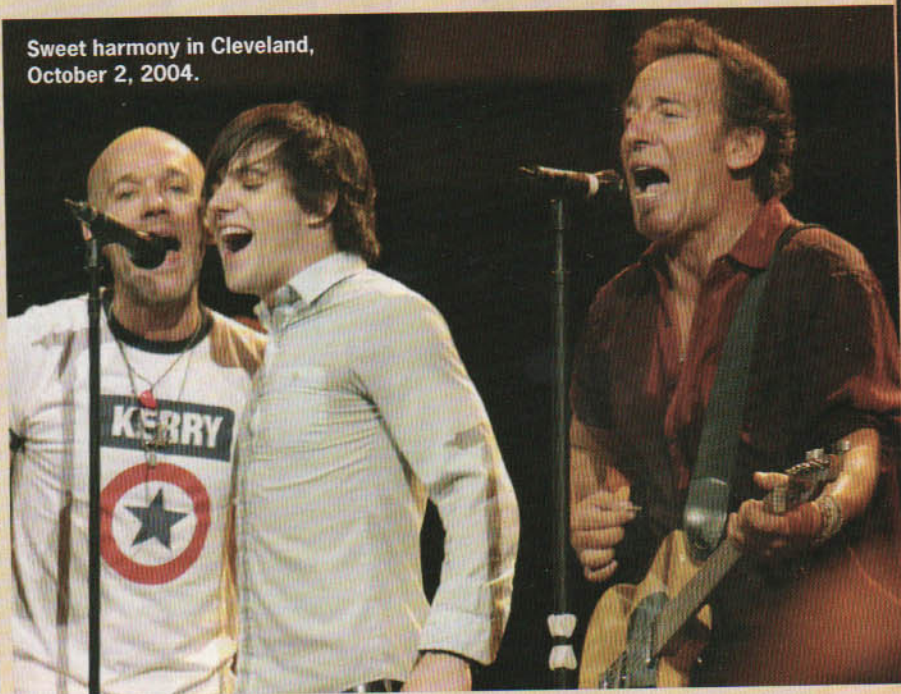
St. Paul, MN,
October 5, 2004.





Last call:
October 13, 2004.

Sweet harmony in Cleveland,
October 2, 2004.



cover everything... but still). First performed by Bruce at the Asbury Holiday shows in 2003, "Peace, Love and Understanding" served as a thrilling rallying cry, with Bruce, Fogerty and the band joined by Bright Eyes and all three members of R.E.M. Both Oberst and Fogerty took solo vocal spots during the song. Visibly nervous to be sharing the stage with the likes of Springsteen and Stipe, Oberst's confidence grew each time he finished his lines, and he was soon bounding across the lip of the stage.

"People Have the Power" was a showcase for Michael Stipe, who was given the honor of singing the first and last verses each night—his exuberant gyrations from the first notes of the swirling, pounding intro gave the performance an energy long before the rousing chorus kicked in. With R.E.M. not on the bill in

New Jersey, Jackson Browne and Patti Scialfa were invited to take solo spots on this one, yet it seemed Bruce missed having Stipe to carry the song. A surprisingly obscure choice for a curtain closer, the song worked exceptionally well; that simple chorus allowed those in the audience unfamiliar with the song to catch on fast and sing along. Each night, Bruce would halt the band as he and the artists led the crowd in chanting "people have the power!" and gave encouragement along the way: "They gotta hear you in Washington!"

In Detroit, Bruce invited the Dixie Chicks on stage for this last number, as they had driven across town once their own Detroit show had finished. Joking, "You haven't started any trouble now, have you?" it was a meaningful gesture to bring the Chicks up to his stage, given his adamant defense last year of their right to speak out. Unfortunately, they only helped out on the choruses, but they were clearly excited to be on the stage with Bruce and the band. (They even spotted a "Free Natalie" shirt in the audience.) Tracy Chapman surely didn't have to be coached for "People Have the Power"; in Orlando, she got points for being so obviously familiar with Patti Smith's recorded version, her phrasing and tone sounding uncannily like the songwriter's.

The same two songs were used as the encore songs for the one-off VFC gathering at the October 11 Washington, DC show, with most of the artists who had performed that night joining in on a crowded stage. We missed Oberst's wild, tremulous vocal, but Maines and Vedder turned in particularly strong performances when called upon. Bruce was truly the master of ceremonies at the show—his stage, sound, and lighting equipment were used, and he and the band performed last. He delegated the singing roles for each artist during the two final songs, enjoying each act taking its turn at the mic, be it John Mellencamp or Jurassic 5. As the DC show ended, Bruce exclaimed, "You've

got the power, now use it!"

But the final word from the stage during the Vote for Change tour came, surprisingly, from someone other than Bruce Springsteen. Bruce gave his thanks to the New Jersey crowd as he and the band took their bows, reminding everyone "November 2nd, vote for change! Get out there, roll up your sleeves and do something, volunteer! Thanks for coming to show your support tonight!" Following that, though, Eddie Vedder also took the time to give his thanks—not to acknowledge the crowd this time, but to single out someone on stage: "Thank you, Bruce, for everything." It was only fitting, not simply for Bruce having provided Vedder an amazing experience, but for Bruce having lent his name, time, talent, and resources to the tour itself. Bruce gave the Vote for Change tour invaluable support, both in publicity and true legitimacy—elements essential to its success.

Time will reveal how we should judge that success. Musically speaking, there's not even need for a vote, let alone a recount; the elated expressions on the faces of fans streaming out of the arenas served as exit polls that told the tale. The stated goal of the tour, at least in immediate terms, is another matter. But advancement "toward the fulfillment of America's promises to its citizens" is a more difficult thing to quantify, the Electoral College notwithstanding. In early October, no matter which way the vote would fall, it was truly inspiring for many rock fans simply to see artists united for something besides Lollapalooza, for the protest song to be more than a relic of another era, for rock 'n' roll to take a stand. Each night during the finale we watched four generations of the genre's best working together on one stage: Fogerty, Springsteen, R.E.M., Bright Eyes. It was an inspiring visual confirmation of the torches that continue to be passed in the search for, as Nick Lowe wrote, the strong, the trusted, and the sweet harmony. 🐦



ANASTASIA PANTSIOS PHOTO

ALAN CHITLIK PHOTO

BRIGHT EYES' CONOR OBERST

Interview by Caryn Rose

Imagine, if you will, a sold-out concert. Audience enraptured, singing along at the top of their lungs, everyone focused on the action onstage, even some tears being shed. Sound familiar? Well, that's what it's like seeing Bright Eyes, the main musical vehicle of Conor Oberst. Unbeknownst, still, to most of the mainstream (despite profiles and articles in the *New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Time*), Oberst formed his first band the same year he started his own record label with a few of his friends: at the age of 14, in his hometown of Omaha, NE. Today, Saddle Creek Records has a highly regarded international presence, releasing Oberst's prolific output as well as those of other local musicians, friends, and other bands they just like.

Backstreets sat down with Oberst on a sunny October afternoon a few weeks after the end of the Vote for Change tour, at a little cafe in the East Village (where Oberst recently relocated). In a week filled with interviews about his two new records, he was delighted to share his thoughts on the tour and talk Springsteen: "I'm happy to talk about Bruce, because he's just a sweet, sweet man."

Backstreets: How would you describe your relationship to Bruce's music? In interviews over the years, you've talked about a lot of people, but I don't recall you ever mentioning him specifically.

Oberst: Yep, he was definitely a favorite of my parents, and that was kind of the first music I heard, what my parents listened to. They liked all the '70s singer/songwriter-type records, and they definitely loved them some Bruce. So I heard all that stuff growing up. And then later on in high school, I revisited a lot of that music that I'd heard as a kid, and liked, but it was always like your parents' music—so it's never quite as cool as what you think is cool at the time, when you're 12 or 13 or whatever. So I went and bought Jackson Browne records and Neil Young records and all that, and as part of that process I bought *Greetings From Asbury Park and Nebraska*, and kind of started from the beginning again.



"I kind of gravitated towards Clarence's side of the stage during the encores, because he just has this kind of aura of chillness around him."

And, you know, in our group of friends in Nebraska, there was always this sort of...the album *Nebraska* had this mythical quality to it. It was like our namesake, you know? And as all the bands—we all run this label together—as we'd go around touring and doing interviews, it would always come up. If Bruce ever got mentioned, it was like, "Well, you must like *Nebraska*." And it's like, "Well, actually, I do." Quite a lot. It's a beautiful record.

So I started over, and I have a couple friends that are considered fanatics in the Bruce department. I have this one friend that made me a mix CD of all of his favorites off all the different records—because I have a lot of them, but I don't have all of them. He's written so many songs, it's amazing, and so many of them are just timeless. I really like *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, too. When that came out I was really into that.

I'm laughing because the running joke is that indie rock kids can only like the three albums you just mentioned.

I think there are great songs on all of them; there are points production-wise, like in the late '70s and '80s, where I can't necessarily relate to the production.

There was a pretty volatile reaction in both the Springsteen audience and the R.E.M. audience to their decision to take part in the

Vote for Change tour. How did your audience react, and did that impact you at all?

I think most of our fans are on the same side of the line as I am, for the most part; they are the people who are going to have to deal with this mess after this is over. What we're fighting for right now isn't even necessarily the next four years, it's the next 50 years. If you look at all the damage that was done in four, imagine four more, and imagine trying to raise kids in this world that's just completely fucked. I think the young people—it's pretty obvious, it's pretty much like, we gotta do something now, while we can. I applaud both Bruce and R.E.M. and all those—especially like the Dixie Chicks—all those people that really risked something by doing that tour and really put themselves, and their art, and in a lot of cases their financial well-being on the line to do this. Because, for me, there wasn't a lot of risk involved. I'm not on a big label that's going to get upset at me, I don't have a huge fanbase of people that lean Republican.

Were these shows the biggest audiences you've ever played for?

Definitely indoor audiences; we've played Glastonbury and some other big festivals, like Coachella. That's a different thing, when it's outside at a festival, you're just sort of part of the scenery. But this was different. The first night, I swear I was going to have a panic attack.

What was it like up there that first night?

It was surreal, for sure, that would be the first word that comes to mind. The first verse of the first song ("One Foot in Front of the Other," from the *Saddle Creek 50* compilation, rerecorded for *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning* as "Landlocked Blues"), I sing it by myself, guitar and vocals [sings]: "If you walk away, I'll walk away...." And I couldn't catch my breath, and my legs felt like they were kind of tingling—I've had panic attacks, but I've never had one onstage before. They're usually not related to stage fright. I really felt like I was going to have one up there, and I was just trying to stumble through it. By the time the band dropped

in, I got a lot more comfortable, and by the middle of the set it sort of dawned on me, "Hey, you're still just playing your songs, and whatever else is going on around you is going to do what it's going to do, but you're still singing your songs." So I just tried to go with that. But it was amazing, just within the five shows, how less weird it got. It was kind of only as weird as I wanted to make it in my own head, you know what I mean?

The difference between, say, Philly and Cleveland was noticeable.

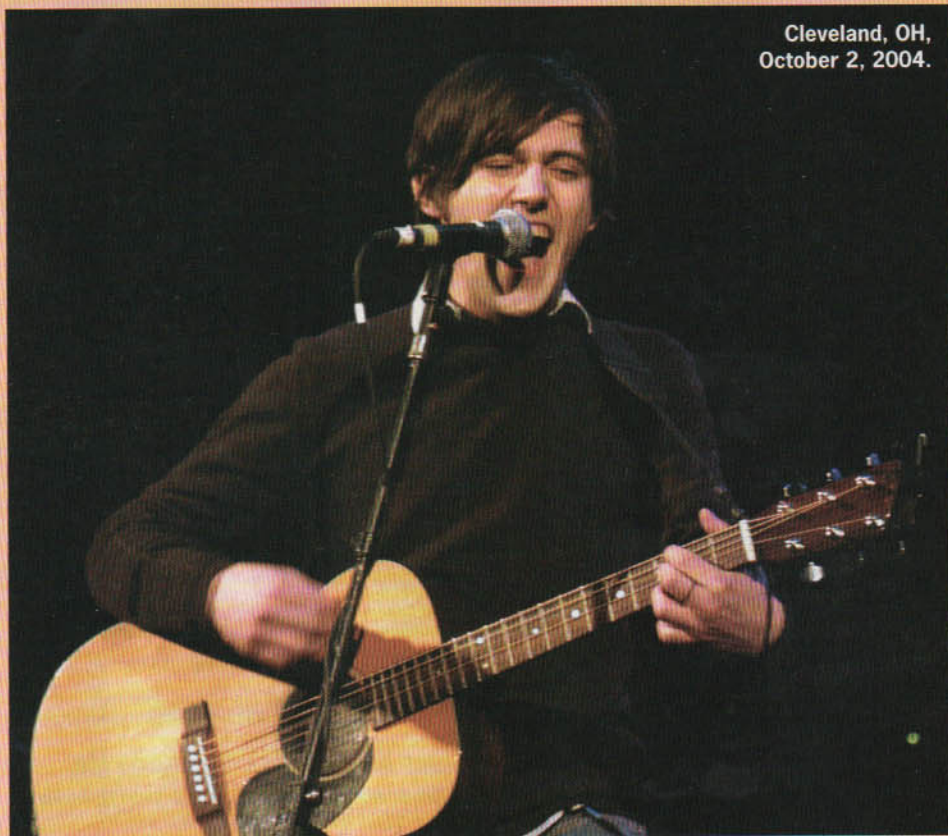
I've known Michael [Stipe] for a few years, and he's great—he's like a friend, and he kind of helped bring us into the whole tour—but I'd never met Bruce before. And he's so sweet. He came to our dressing room before we played the first night, and just was like [*imitates gravelly Bruce voice*], "You're gonna be fine! Go out there and do it!" and just gave us the ol' "Go for it!" And I was like, "Thanks, man, that's cool." And then we go out and we play, and then, right after we're done, back in our dressing room, he comes back again: "It was great!" It totally made us feel so good. He's awesome because there's a temptation when you meet somebody that's your icon...I've met a few, and it's kind of rough sometimes. But he's so disarming and just like we've been bros forever. There's no, "I'm Bruce Springsteen," there's none of that. I kind of gravitated towards Clarence's side of the stage during the encores, because he just has this kind of aura of chillness around him. They were just real, and amazing—and not only just playing with all those guys, but also doing something, for whatever it ends up being worth, being part of something that, one way or the other, is going to be pretty historic.

So how did you feel when you walked off-stage after that first set?

I thought it was okay, you know, I did. And I'm sure the introduction had a lot to do with it. It seemed quieter than a lot of big club shows that we've played, where people are talking over you. Maybe it was just so big that I couldn't hear them, but it didn't feel like that—it felt like people were listening. For me, just to get through it, I had to take on some kind of trance-like state. Because I would have been overwhelmed if I hadn't.

When you came to sing "Peace, Love and Understanding" on the first night, we saw Bruce showing you the teleprompter, and you looked a little like, "Okay, I don't know if I can do this." And then you sang your line and kind of pogoed to the back of the stage, looking pretty happy. Did that moment feel like it looked like to the audience?

Well, the thing was, we were there in Philadelphia the day before, we'd come early. They were all rehearsing, and we were just kind of hanging out—we were just going to jump up onstage and soundcheck whenever we had a chance. So at some point Michael came back to the dressing room and said, "We're doing a Patti Smith song and we're doing 'Peace, Love and Understanding'...do you want to come?" So I said, "What are you talking about?" I went up on stage, they were all rehearsing, and that was the first time I met Bruce. I walked up, and [*incredulously*]



Cleveland, OH,
October 2, 2004.

ANASTASIA PANTSIOS PHOTO

BRIGHT EYES setlist

October 1, 2, 3, 5

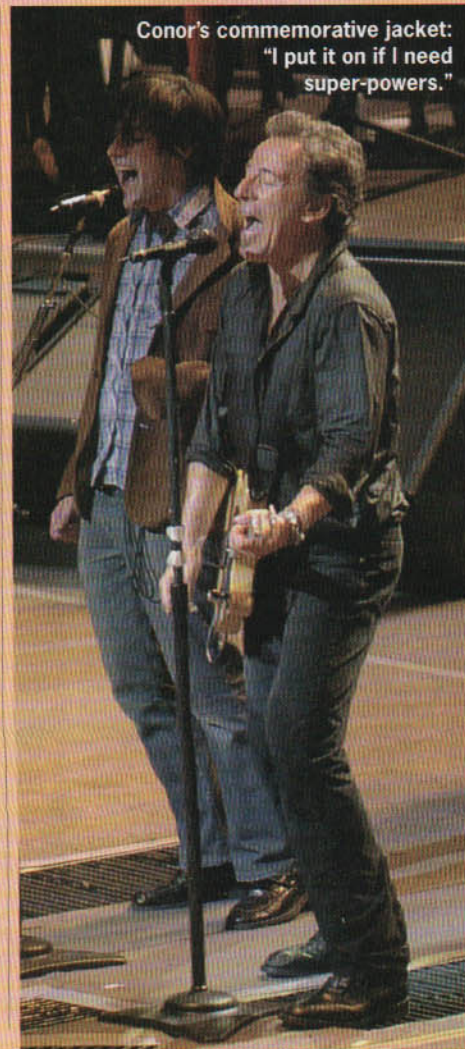
One Foot in Front of the Other [AKA
Landlocked Blues]
Old Soul Song
Trees Get Wheeled Away
You Will. You? Will. You? Will. You? Will.
Another Travelin' Song
Poison Oak
Road to Joy

they stopped what they were doing, and he shook my hand. And I'm thinking, well, this is weird.

So we kind of practiced it the night before, but even with all that, still, walking out there with the crowd and everything, I'm sure I looked freaked out, because I was freaked out. And they were so supportive. Michael was even tapping out the meter for the words for the Patti Smith song on my back, because the phrasing is kind of weird.

Bruce always has a theme to his setlists, and R.E.M. kind of had a combination between conveying a message and wanting to make sure their setlist was accessible to a mostly Springsteen audience. So if a band as big as R.E.M. is worried about their setlist, how did you approach putting one together?

Well, I just assumed that no one would ever have heard any of our songs, so it made it a little easier. We actually played all songs that are new songs, they're going to be on our new record, so in that sense they're the ones I'm the most excited about playing, but also they happen to be the ones that have the most political element to them,



Conor's commemorative jacket:
"I put it on if I need
super-powers."

ALAN CHITLIK PHOTO

so I went with those. We have a song about the protest that happened in New York, and we have these other songs—they're not completely political songs, but are sort of where politics enters into your regular life and forces you to change, maybe, the way you think about things. How it makes life more uncomfortable, or you have more fear, all that. So I figured those would be the ones to sing.

A little over two years ago, you said you never thought you'd sing political songs, but suddenly it seemed the only thing worth singing. A year ago, you were doing a particularly politically motivated tour, and saying that you wished other people would get involved. And now, you were part of Vote for Change. What would you have done if this hadn't come along?

Well, there were a lot of ideas floating around, possible election-oriented tours and stuff; we had our ear to the ground, looking for something to be a part of. I definitely wanted to do something, and this just sort of came up. It was the most organized, and it had the potential for the most direct impact, as far as the idea of going to the swing states, which was just genius. It was a tour but it wasn't a long tour, it had diverse musicians participating, and the fact that it would be a large audience, and the fact that there would be multiple shows going on in the same state, it was really well put together. So all of the other ideas kind of paled in comparison to the scope of this one.

Your audience has a really strong emotional connection to your songs, and so does the Springsteen audience to Bruce's songs. Did you see any similarities?

It was tremendously impressive, and I don't get to see really big concerts that much. I just don't end up seeing real big ones like that. And it was

interesting in the sense of just the magnitude of it all, but also how the size—the connection or intensity that you would expect out of a 500-person audience in a little club seeing a band they really love, it was that same fervor, but there are 20,000 people. It's amazing. So much of what I see of bands that play arenas and stadiums and that kind of shit, it's just like this bullshit, it's seems really boring, there's not a lot of interaction. But this was completely different for Bruce, because obviously these people, they've been there a long time, and they're in it, they're going all the way—wherever he's going, they're going.

We were about to go onstage in, I think, Detroit—whatever the smallest of the shows was. And Bruce says *(once again with the imitation)*: "Oh, this is a nice little hall, a nice hall." And I'm like, "Hall? This is a stadium!" But, you know, that's where he does his thing, that's his element. He's playing in his space for his people, and it's really cool. I definitely felt like I could have been a guest at this weird thing—he made it seem like going to his house.

He definitely likes playing master of ceremonies.

He's good at it, he made me feel comfortable. And I'm usually not comfortable.

What would you want Bruce fans to know about your music?

I'd say, maybe wait until the new record comes out, start there *(laughs)*.

You said that when the last record came out!

I guess the thing to know about the band, if you're curious—it wouldn't seem like it, from my age or anything, but actually I've written a lot of songs and put out a lot of music, and it's all at

least attempts to be different, to try on different styles. Obviously we haven't always been successful in what we've set out to do, but we've definitely been trying the whole time, doing our own thing. So if you hear something by us and you don't like it, it won't necessarily mean that you won't like any of our stuff. Obviously there is a common thread in it, but I think that there's a lot of different stuff in there, and hopefully, it's continuing to improve. So maybe if you don't even like the new record, wait until we make another one.

If you could cover a Bruce song, which one would it be?

Well, I tried to get him to play, he said he was gonna do it, but...that song "For You"? I love that song. I don't know if I could do it justice. It's impossible to pick a favorite, but that was the one, when given the chance, like: "Do you ever play that song still?" He was like *(gravel voice again)*: "I play that, every once in a while."

He played it solo-piano last tour.

That's what he said! He's like, "I play it on piano, maybe I'll do it tonight." And I'm like, "Really?!" And then, he didn't end up doing it. *(For You)* was on the written setlist in St. Paul, but was dropped for "The River."

Everyone wants to know about the jacket. [Bruce presented Conor with a jacket his last night of the tour in St. Paul.]

The last night, he gave me a jacket, which was just—I had no idea it was coming, I was like, "What??" I was on the side of the stage, kind of hanging by Clarence, when I hear, "And we got him a jacket!" And I look over, and everyone's looking at me. So I kind of walk over there, and put it on, and went, "Sweet!"

Later on he told me that he and Patti, they were at a flea market or something, they like to go to flea markets, and they saw this jacket and they thought it would fit me so they got it for me. And I was just like, "You guys are just like the sweetest, raddest people," I was just... it made me feel so good.

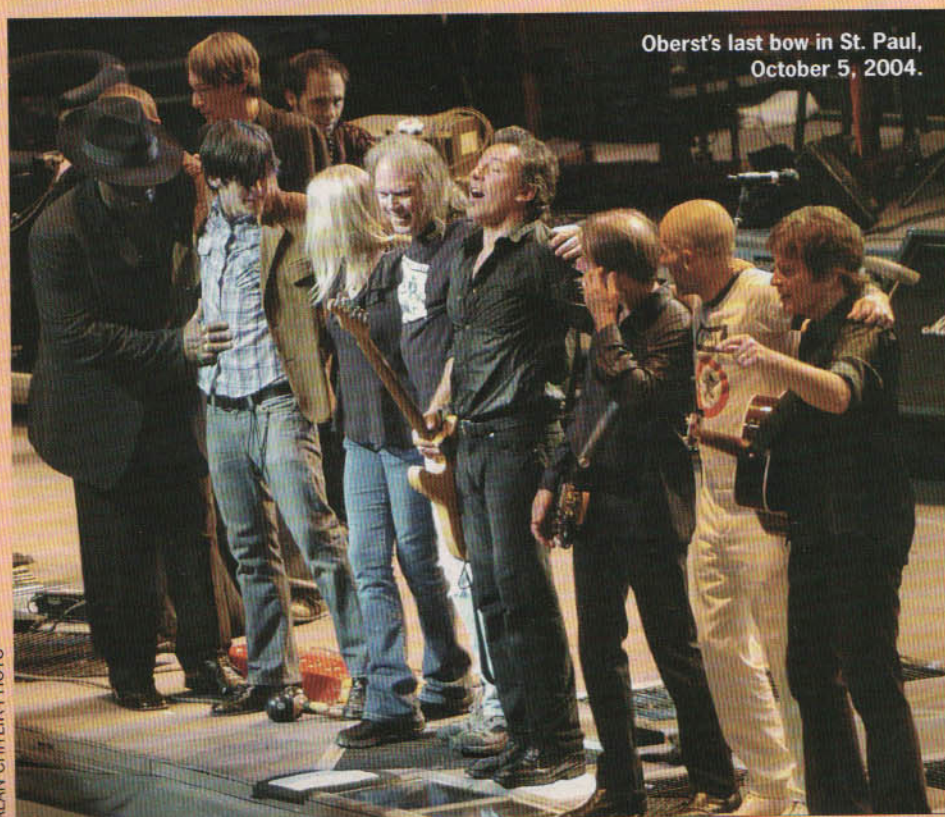
What does it look like?

It's a brown suede jacket with three buttons, real simple—I'm not good with, like, vintage years, but I'm guessing at least early '70s, maybe '60s. It's an old jacket, it's got stains and stuff on it.

Does it fit?

It fits; my arms are short, but I'm probably going to grow into it. It does fit pretty well. And the thing is, I wouldn't normally wear leather and stuff, but I was like, it just doesn't matter. Now I put it on if I need, like, super-powers or something. And people are like, "Where'd you get that jacket?" *(Slyly)*: "A friend gave it to me." 🐾

Bright Eyes' fifth and sixth full-length records, *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning* and *Digital Ash in a Digital Urn*, will be released on Saddle Creek Records (www.saddle-creek.com) on January 25, 2005. Five of the songs performed in Bright Eyes' set ("Landlocked Blues," "Old Soul Song," "Poison Oak," "Road to Joy," and "Another Travelin' Song") appear on *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning*.



Oberst's last bow in St. Paul, October 5, 2004.

ALAN CHITLIK PHOTO

ALAN CHITLIK PHOTO

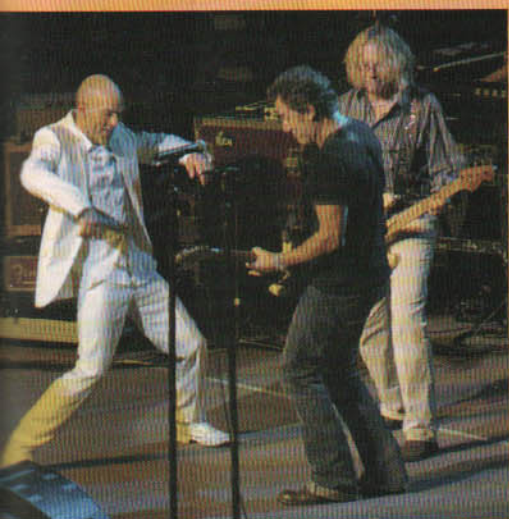
R.E.M.'s MIKE MILLS

Interview by Gary Graff

One only had to look at the grin on Mike Mills' face during the Vote for Change tour shows to know that the R.E.M. multi-instrumentalist was getting as big a kick out of the proceedings as anyone in the crowd. And at no time did he smile more than when he and R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck joined the E Street Band to play on "Born to Run" and subsequent encores of "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding" and "People Have the Power." The tour was, of course, a unique experience for R.E.M., which has headlined its own shows since the mid-'80s. It's been a long time since the group—which Mills, Buck and frontman Michael Stipe co-founded with now-retired drummer Bill Berry in 1980 in Athens, GA—opened for anybody. But one certainly got the sense from watching the shows—and from talking with Mills shortly after tour's end—that R.E.M. was more than happy to be the junior partner in this endeavor.

Backstreets: So what was the Vote for Change tour like for you?

Mills: Pretty ridiculous. I mean, getting to play "Born to Run" with Bruce is... it's a career highlight.



DAVE MILLER PHOTO

"Between Neil Young walking on in St. Paul. Bruce playing our stuff with us, and us getting to play 'Born to Run' with the E Street Band, it is kind of dream-like."

Were you surprised at how much interplay there was between Bruce and R.E.M. during the tour?

Oh yeah. We had no idea. I was hoping, y'know, that we'd get together on something, but who knew?

What were the mechanics of the collaborations? Who asked who, and how were they put together?

I guess we started talking about it a couple days before [the tour]. We, of course, invited Bruce to play with us, not knowing if he would or not. He said he'd be happy to, just send him some songs to learn. So we picked a few and sent them to him, and he learned three or four of them. Then on the day we got there [in Philadelphia] he invited us to do "Born to Run," which we pretty much knew anyway. I was familiar enough with it that it didn't take long to sit down and learn it.

The day of the first show, eh?

I think we got it the day before. We had a day of rehearsals with all the bands the day before, and of course we had ["Born to Run"] on our iPods and learned it that night. We just hoped that Bruce still sang it in the same key! [laughs].

You were the second bass player on that song. What were you playing?

I was playing fuzz bass, and it's just a testament to those guys' coolness that they were willing to let me do that, because fuzz bass takes up a lot of room.

The members of R.E.M. are documented big fans of Patti Smith. She actually had

quite a presence at your shows without being there, via Bruce performing "Because the Night" and everyone closing the evening with "People Have the Power." How did that work out?

Well, I don't know if Bruce was already planning to do "Because the Night" or not. I think he's aware of Michael's association with Patti, but I don't remember whose idea it was first to do the song.

"People Have the Power" was our idea. I think we threw it at [Springsteen] and said "Look, this would be a good one for everybody to play if we're gonna do something like that." I think it's the honesty and the integrity with which they're written and played; "People Have the Power" is a great song, and Patti Smith wrote it because she believes it. It's a very real message that we were trying to get across to people.

Were you surprised to discover that Bruce and the guys were familiar with or fans of R.E.M.?

Well, you never know. Yeah, I was a little surprised, but a lot of those guys—I mean, they're real. Their love of music is a very real thing, and they may not seek out every new band on the horizon, but they don't live in a bubble, either.

Bruce gave you some great introductions each night.

Oh yeah, those were very nice. I didn't know he was even going to introduce us until right before we went on. "Can Bruce introduce you?" [Laughs.] "Yes, Bruce can introduce us, by all means." And he's really cool, 'cause he and Michael went out there right before Bright Eyes went on, and he told [the crowd], "This is a no Broooce zone." That's so

classy. He's just a classy guy, that's the one way you can put it.

It seemed like he was pretty charged to be sharing the night with other bands since he's seldom used opening acts.

That's true. He was very committed to the idea of it. The power of this tour came from the combination of artists—he wanted to reinforce that we were all on the same page, and one way to do that was for us to all play at the same time. He's a very committed individual; once he commits to something, he's there 100 percent. I honestly think one of the reasons we've survived so long, and Bruce, too, is that people recognize the honesty and integrity with which we live our lives and careers. I think that gets through to people.

The whole thing was a kind of surreal experience, wasn't it?

Yeah, it's pretty surreal—between Neil Young walking on in St. Paul, Bruce playing our stuff with us, and us getting to play “Born to Run” with the E Street Band, it is kind of dream-like.

What did you make of Neil ping-ponging from show to show?

Neil is an iconoclast, and he enjoys being sort of a floating musician. So he'd show up one night with Pearl Jam and another night with the Dixie Chicks and another night with us and Bruce. He's just great that way. There are few people in this world that you don't tell what to do, and I think two of them are Bruce Springsteen and Neil Young.

Is there anything you guys learned from being on the road and playing each night with Bruce and the E Street Band?

I think just his intensity.... I don't think Bruce does anything less than 100 percent, and it certainly gives you a bar to aim for.

What was the backstage scene like?

There were nice backstage hangs, getting to talk to most of the guys, at least a little bit. They're

all pretty healthy—I guess they have to be. They all look so damn good, and they're at least ten years older than I am, so it's pretty amazing. You would never guess that they're as old as they are; they rock really hard. It's pretty calm back there; there's no decadence. And I think there's a mutual respect back there.

Was there a lot of political talk between the musicians on the tour?

Not really so much. We all knew why we were there, and we all knew that to one degree or another we feel the same. Not everyone was exactly in agreement with every aspect, but everyone wanted Bush out of there, let's put it that way. Not everyone agreed with every single detail of each person's political philosophy, but we didn't have to—because the overall commitment to what we were doing was solid as a rock.

Some of the debates occurred during the tour. Did you all get together and watch?

We did watch, not always together. I watched the first Kerry-Bush debate in replay; they showed it afterwards in its entirety, which I got to see at about one or two in the morning.

Do you have any sense of what the tour accomplished?

There's no way to tell at this point. I know for a fact that people left the shows energized and optimistic as a rule, which is what we were after. Whether that translates into voting and volunteerism, I don't know, but I'm guessing it helped.

Did you feel any negative backlash from being part of the tour or taking the stance you did?

There was no booing that I heard at all. Most people seemed very receptive and responsive to the political comments. There was “Broooocing,” but I can kinda tell the difference between that and booing [laughs]. I've heard there was some negative reaction, but no one had the balls to tell me to my face. ➡

R.E.M.'s PETER BUCK

Interview by Caryn Rose

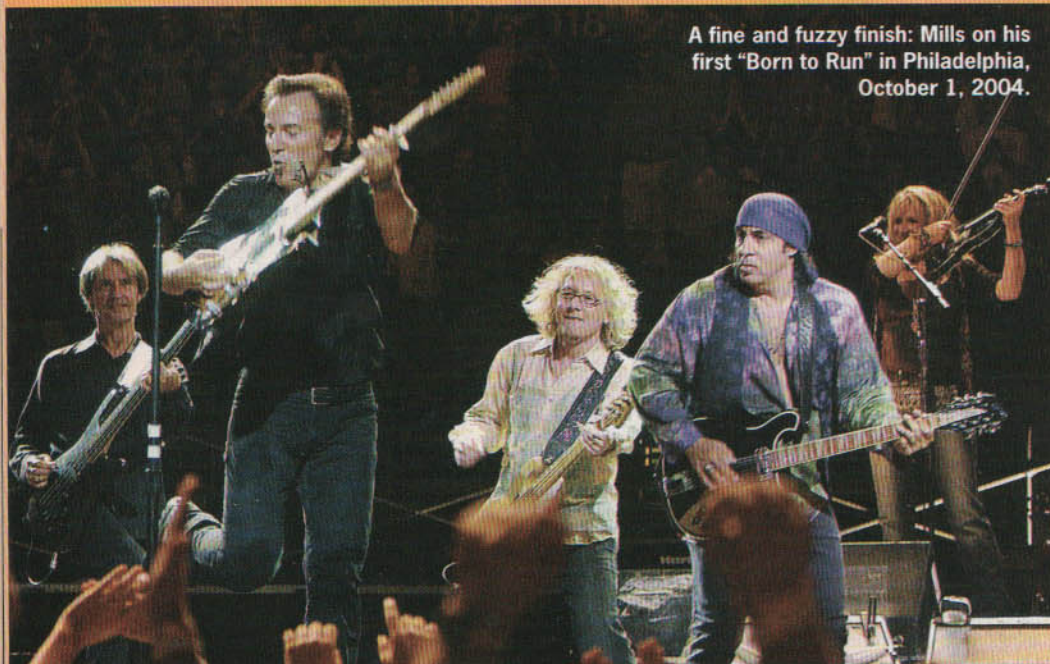
Peter Buck of R.E.M. was once-upon-a-time referred to by the *New Musical Express* as “the guitar hero of the Underground.” This was back in the halcyon days of the early '80s, before “alternative music” was a commercial radio format, when an entire post-punk musical revolution took place in a blitzkrieg bop on the interstates of the U.S., where the foot soldiers were independent, non-major-label rock bands (the likes of the Replacements, the dB's, Jason and the Scorchers, Hüsker Dü, the Minutemen) in Econoline vans playing any town possessing a club that would have them, or barring that, a disco that had “New Wave Tuesdays!” Two decades later, R.E.M.—Buck, Michael Stipe, and Mike Mills—are no longer revolutionaries but instead are at the vanguard as the elder statesmen of alternative rock, and truly one of America's great rock and roll bands.

Buck is also a die-hard rock 'n' roll fanatic; in the early days, he'd relentlessly plug unknown bands, knowing that one mention in an interview would prompt thousands of the faithful to go out and buy their records and go to their shows. He's a rock historian, he's an avid collector, he owns four—four?!—iPods, and, at age 47, he is an inspiration as a music fan to any rock aficionado of any age.

Peter graciously sat down with *Backstreets* before the Cleveland VFC show to discuss the tour, R.E.M.'s history, John Fogerty bootlegs, anecdotes about seeing Bruce in Atlanta in 1975 at the age of 18, and what he's listening to on those four iPods.

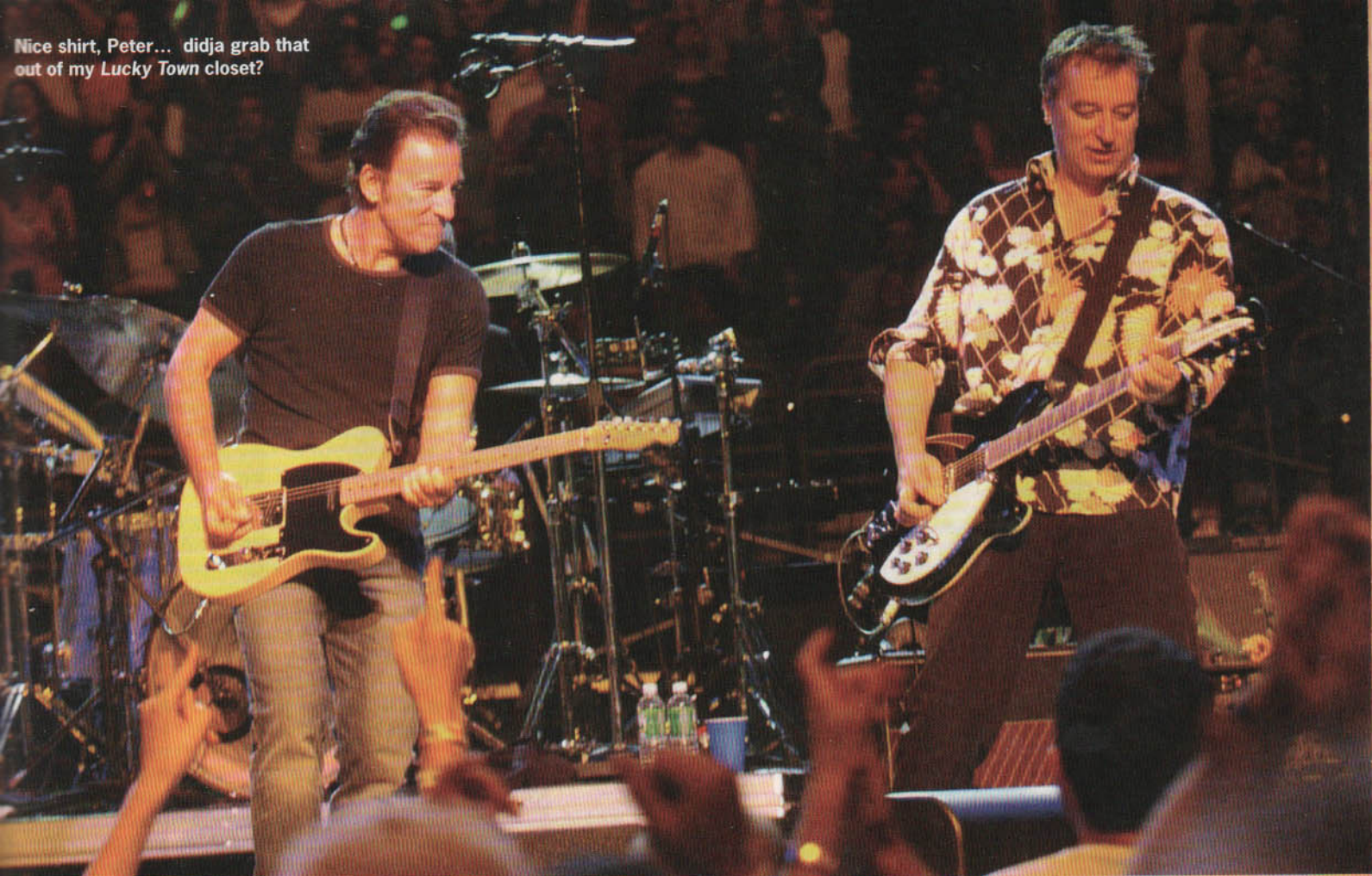
Backstreets: So, last night, first Bruce walks out with Michael, and then Bruce sings “Man on the Moon,” and then Michael sings “Because the Night,” and then you and Mike played on “Born to Run”... our heads were exploding. How was it for you guys?

Buck: Much the same. I know that Bruce doesn't bring people onstage with him a lot. John Fogerty, and then us, and Conor [Oberst] from Bright Eyes... In the past it hasn't been a lot. He never



A fine and fuzzy finish: Mills on his first “Born to Run” in Philadelphia, October 1, 2004.

Nice shirt, Peter... didja grab that out of my Lucky Town closet?



has an opening band, first of all, unless it's some kind of charity thing.

And, you know, I've loved his music for years. I saw him before *Born to Run* came out in '75. It was the week after the Bottom Line shows, he came to Georgia and did three nights [the 8/21-23/75 shows at the Electric Ballroom in Atlanta]. I saw all three nights. And he was doing, like, "Jungleland," and "Born to Run," "She's the One," maybe "Meeting Across the River"—I remember thinking, "Gee, that 'Born to Run' song is pretty great." And then to be almost 30 years later onstage playing it with him, you know, it is mind-blowing.

What were rehearsals like? You guys were all together on Thursday [September 30], is that correct?

Yeah, [R.E.M.] had rehearsed over at the Tweeter Center during the early part of the week, and I think Bruce and his band were over at the Wachovia Center, and then we came over on Thursday. We just rehearsed, and then I watched them rehearse, but then I had more press to do and all this kind of crap. And then Friday, we had another rehearsal, and that's when we sat in with the E Street Band and Bruce sat in with us. He actually learned three of our songs, so we're probably going to switch it up a little bit.

What did you rehearse together?

Well, of course we did "Man on the Moon," "Bad Day," and that song "Permanent Vacation" that's on our DVD [Perfect Square]—it's the only place

we ever put it out, it's a song we wrote in 1979. It was one of the first four or five. Bruce e-mailed or faxed us or something and asked if it would be appropriate if we wanted to play together, and I was like, "Well, sure." So Michael and Mike and I talked about what we might want to do, and we sent him a CD of six or eight things, and he picked three that he just felt like he could be good at.

Some of us were debating what Bruce would guest on, if anything, and when he came out the first night, we thought, "Of course, he would want to do the song that mentions Elvis!" So he could do the little shoulder thing...

Yeah [laughs], there is that; and then, you know, "Bad Day" is just a rocker, and he does a really good background vocal on that, and on "Permanent Vacation" he takes a verse. It's not the smartest song we ever wrote—Michael was 18 or something.

How does it feel being onstage in front of someone else's audience after all this time? Especially a Springsteen audience.

Yeah, we were a little nervous. Just because he never does a bad show—it's always gonna be a great show. And his audience is really partisan. But they seemed to be open-minded. If we were just doing another night at the Meadowlands and they threw us on at the bottom of the bill, we'd probably be just in the way, but, you know, this is a charity show, and everyone realizes it's a little bit different. We're playing together—it's not like a

rock show where you're promoting your record or whatever. I think that people like the idea that it's a little different.

What was your impression of your audience the first night?

I was looking out there, I was catching a lot of people's eyes, and I saw some people singing—even the new single, some people were singing that. So I figured, well, it's not available, so they're fans. Some people obviously didn't know who we were. Part of it is, I see some people who are older than our fans are, who are maybe 50, who probably haven't seen us. So that's why we did some of the hits. I like playing those songs, but we don't usually do "The One I Love."

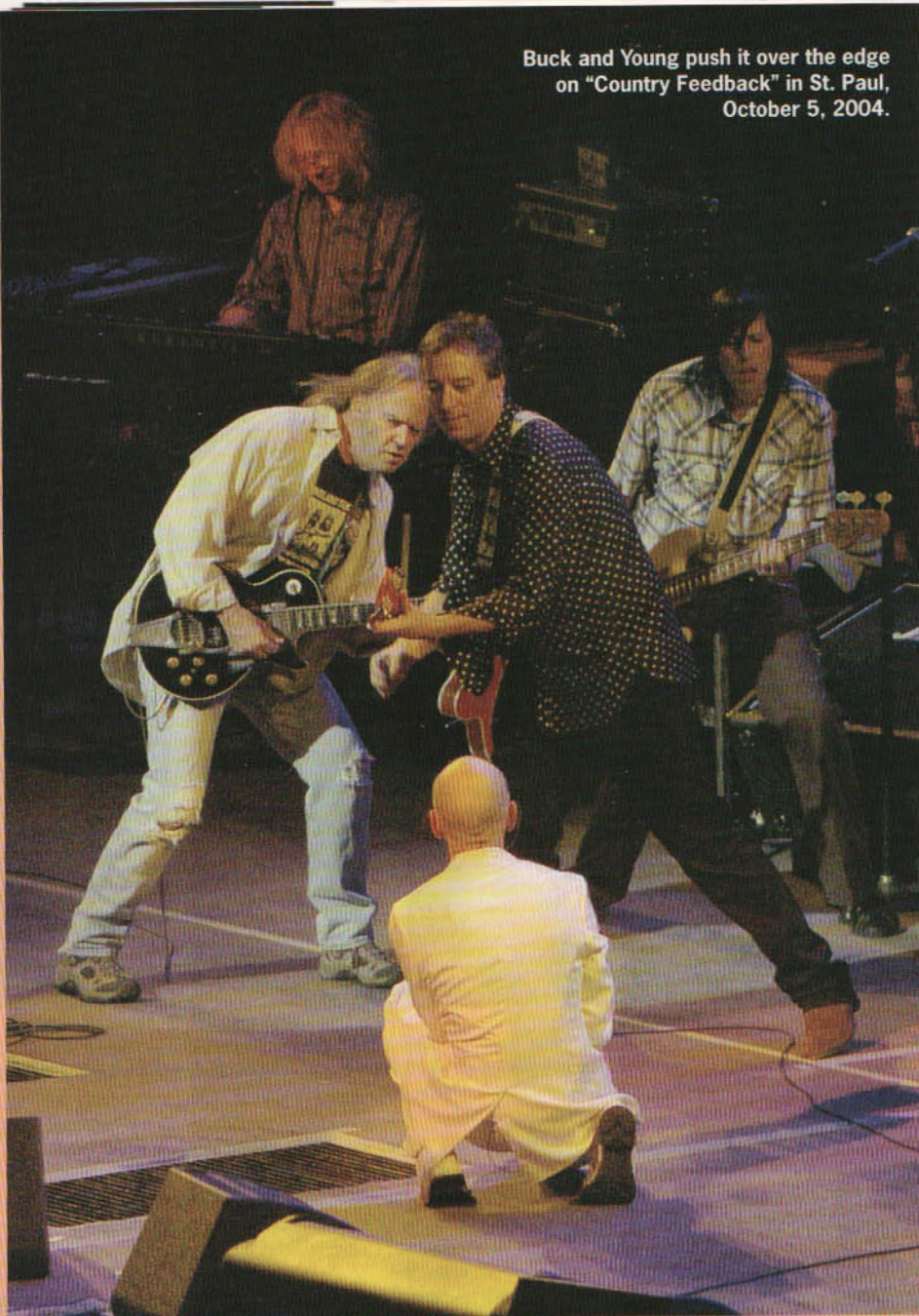
The audience seemed very glad to hear that song.

And we're going to do it again tonight—the idea being, okay, that's a song that's been on the radio and they've probably heard it, especially if they were listening to radio then and not now. I mean, I'm 47, and I have four iPods, and I buy like 20 records a week, it's kind of legendary. I'm totally obsessed with it. But a lot of people in their 50s stopped listening to [new] music. So knowing we're playing to his audience, we stacked some hits in there.

Bruce is known for thinking thematically, and even Conor was clearly aiming for a thematically charged setlist. Were you guys thinking more along those lines, or was it

DEBRA L. ROTHENBERG PHOTOS

Buck and Young push it over the edge
on "Country Feedback" in St. Paul,
October 5, 2004.



more, as Michael likes to say, "We're R.E.M. and this is what we do?"

Well, we have the new record we want to play, and we're trying to do the stuff that's more political. Of the new songs we did "Around the Sun," which is optimistic; "Final Straw," which is kind of an angry song; "Leaving New York," which is just the new single and we really like playing it.

I thought that fit thematically.

It does, it's got that feeling—and also, we're kind of thinking, "Well, maybe they've heard it on the radio." You're a little worried when it's not your audience. So we were trying to juggle [those songs with] the songs we love to play: "Man on the Moon," and "Losing My Religion," and "Walk Unafraid," which is the personal favorite of all of ours. I just love that song, and the record doesn't capture what it is live. There's no drummer on that thing—it's a drum machine, and I think Mike and I played drums. I like the record version—live, it just got bigger and wilder.

And then we did "World Leader Pretend," which fit perfectly. So we were trying to think about things thematically, but we did specifically want to do the new stuff. We did both of the new songs from the "Best of" [2003's *In Time*]: "Bad Day," which is overtly political, and "Animal," which is just kind of a rock song. Because I really didn't want to go out and do really old songs. I mean, Bruce did three songs from *The Rising*.

Yeah, some people were kind of surprised.

I looked at his setlist last night [Philadelphia] and thought, "That's a really interesting set of songs." The order they were in... At one point they were going to open with a song that I don't know.

Was it a new song? "Devils and Dust"?

Yeah, I think so.

We're hoping.

Well, I'm sure he's going to change the setlist every night.

I know you're a big John Fogerty fan. What did you think of his set? Were there songs you'd like to hear that you didn't get to hear?

You know, I'd like to hear a whole Creedence set; I love his first solo record, too, and his later stuff. I thought "Deja Vu" was a really good song, that was the first or second time I heard it, but I liked it. I was out kind of listening from the audience so I couldn't get all the words, but I liked it. But...he just sounds like John Fogerty, he just opens his mouth and he sings. "Fortunate Son" is the perfect song for that.

So yeah, I'm a huge fan, I've got a bootleg DVD in my road case over there—I'm not going to tell him that. I bought all of their records when they came out, and I bought the box set not too long ago, so I've paid for every one of their records twice. So it's okay if I have a bootleg!

You made Neil Young drag out [incredible rarity] "Ambulance Blues" at the Bridge School Concerts one year [1999]. Got anything similar you'd like Bruce to drag out of the archives?

Well, he did "Lost in the Flood," I was shocked about that. I'd never seen him do it; I was like, "Whoa!" And anything from *Nebraska* would be good for me, because that stuff doesn't get that much of an airing.

With Neil, he called me because we were gonna back him up, and he said, "Tell me which..." and I said, "Well, I've got a list of, like, 15 songs." The first ones were "On the Beach" and "Ambulance Blues," and he goes, "Really?" So we actually worked up "On the Beach" with Neil, too, we just couldn't get him to play it. He was like [*launches into eerily accurate Neil Young imitation*]: "Peter, this is supposed to be like an uplifting event. If I do those two songs, it's like 18 minutes of downer!" I'm like, "Yeah, but they're great songs!" I mean, I don't think he'd ever played that song in the last 30 years.

I also said, "How about 'Flying on the Ground is Wrong'?" He goes, "Oh, no way..." but then he ended up doing it acoustic. I had "Bad Fog of Loneliness" and "Push It Over the Edge"—he's like, "Really? Push It Over the Edge? Where'd you hear that?" And I said, "I have some of the bootlegs." He was kind of like, "That's interesting." So I gave him a list of super-obscure stuff that fans would like, and getting him to play "Ambulance Blues" was great.

Yeah, it was. And we were kind of hoping you might wield the same kind of influence on Mr. Springsteen.

Well, they're pretty all rehearsed and ready to go, you know. But I'm sure he'll pull some stuff out.

In August of 1985, I remember being in a car with my friends, on my way to the Capitol Theatre in Passaic, New Jersey to see you play, and we got caught in a traffic jam of fans going to Giants Stadium to see Bruce on the *Born in the U.S.A.* tour. And your tour bus got caught in the same traffic jam, and it made you late, and when you guys arrived, you were asking the fans what was causing the traffic jam, and we told you it was Bruce. So that resulted in Michael launching into a

very, um, raw version of "Born to Run" that night. In 1985, you were kind of the anti-Bruce—it was a very different time—and now, here you guys are on the same stage.

You know, I was a Springsteen fan before I was a professional musician; so when I was listening to Sonic Youth and the Bad Brains, I was still listening to Bruce.

Yes, but you were obviously an exception—you have to admit, there was a very clear separation back then.

There was for a lot of people, but you know, I thought *Tusk* was the best record of that year. All my friends were like, "You like *Tusk*?" I was like, "Fleetwood Mac is a great band, guys, and so are the Clash."

I didn't ever really expect that we'd be sharing a bill, or that he'd be singing a song I wrote, or that we'd be, at one point, selling almost as many records as he sold. But, to me, we're kind of... American bands. As much as we have influences all over the map, we're people that grew up in the South playing this music that came from folk music and country and blues—it's not like it's Stravinsky. This is something we all have in common, and you know, we listen to a lot of the same records. I just was never a doctrinaire punk rocker where if you didn't have the right leather jacket... I don't believe in the "Year Zero" thing. I mean, in 1977 I bought *Rumours*, and I thought *Saturday Night Fever* was a great fuckin' record; I liked the Bee Gees stuff the best. I still listen to free jazz, and punk, and whatever.

It's odd to be looking over and seeing Bruce play guitar on a song I wrote. But, you know, a lot of this is odd.

If you had to explain to some of your fans, "Hey, this song is the reason I like Bruce," what song would you play for them?

I don't know, that version of "Born in the U.S.A." last night probably hasn't ever been more apropos.... For me, I'd probably go back and play something off of his second record, because that was the one that really hooked me. I like the first record, I bought it when it came out, but the second record was the one where I said, "Wow, this is kind of a whole different animal." The really long songs, and the songs with three or four bridges.

And then *Born to Run*—I was lucky to get to see him play that stuff before the record was out. Remember, you didn't really know—there wasn't any TV, and there weren't any reviews. I kind of thought, "Well, he'll come out with an acoustic guitar, and maybe he'll end with a Chuck Berry song." And it was—well, you can imagine what he was like in 1975, it was a rock show. And it was like, "Whoa!" I went the first night, and I walked out and said, "Man, I gotta come every other night." I was working in a factory—a warehouse, actually, it wasn't a factory...

This is kind of starting to sound like a Bruce song [laughing] ...

[Laughs] Yeah, well, I was saving money to go to college; it was the summer I got out of high school, and I was saving money so I could go to college and still, you know, eat. And I had to be there at 7:00 a.m., so that meant getting up at

5:30, and he didn't finish until 2 a.m., and I had to drive home.

What else do you remember about the show?

Well, he did a lot of covers: he did "Pretty Flamingo," he did that Crystals song "And Then She Kissed Me," I think he did "Route 66," I'm not sure about that. There's a bootleg from one of the nights. He wasn't that popular then in Atlanta—one of the nights, I got there and there were only like 300 people. So all three nights, I sat at the first table, right in the front. He'd go offstage during "Spirit in the Night," and on the third night he was on his knees right next to me, and kind of off-mic he goes, "Hey, weren't you here last night?" And I went, "Yeah—I was actually here the first night, too, I went all three nights." And he says, "Really!" and then starts singing [laughs].

And so here I am playing with the guy years later... and I remember being 17 or 18 and sitting at this table, and there's Bruce Springsteen right there.

Did you see the Fox Theater shows in 1978?

Yep, I saw both of those. And when there was the lawsuit stuff going on with his manager, he played two shows in Atlanta in between *Born to Run* and *Darkness*, at the Civic Center [3/2/77] and the Fox [3/26/76]. At the Civic Center, I saw a lot of the songs that ended up on the *Tracks* record, a couple things I don't remember—that was almost 30 years ago—and songs that didn't end up on records. He wasn't doing anything from *Darkness*; he had a horn section. So I saw him those three nights in '75, the two nights in between, both in '78. And then when he came through again in 1980, I was in a band and I was playing, so I didn't see him again until the *Unplugged* thing.

When was the first time you met him?

It was at some MTV thing in like '94, '95.

Favorite album? If you had to pick one.

The River—I think.

Which E Street Band member would you dress as for Halloween?

It would have to be Miami Steve; we kind of have the same pattern shirts.



It wouldn't be a Peter Buck interview without giving you a chance to plug some of your favorite unknown or lesser-known bands.

Do you know Joseph Arthur? He's opening for us, and they're amazing records, like on a John Lennon level. Really good singing, really moving, beautiful... kind of psychedelic. The new Libertines record is good. This new group called Kasabian, their record's pretty decent—I've only played it once, I just got it. I bought the new Nick Cave, that's really good; too much female choir, but it's still a really good record. A band that's opening for us, Five Eight, they have a new record that's really good. Dexter Romweber—it's a great record, and he really didn't get the respect he should have gotten. It just seems a shame in a world like this—he should be playing for more than 100 people a night. Because he's the real thing, he really is. 🐾

R.E.M. will be touring the globe, promoting their latest album, Around the Sun, through the end of 2004 and into 2005. See www.remhq.com for more information and tour dates.

R.E.M. setlists

10/1: The One I Love/Begin the Begin/Leaving New York/Animal/World Leader Pretend/Final Straw/She Just Wants to Be/Bad Day/Around the Sun/Losing My Religion/Walk Unafraid/Man on the Moon (with Springsteen)

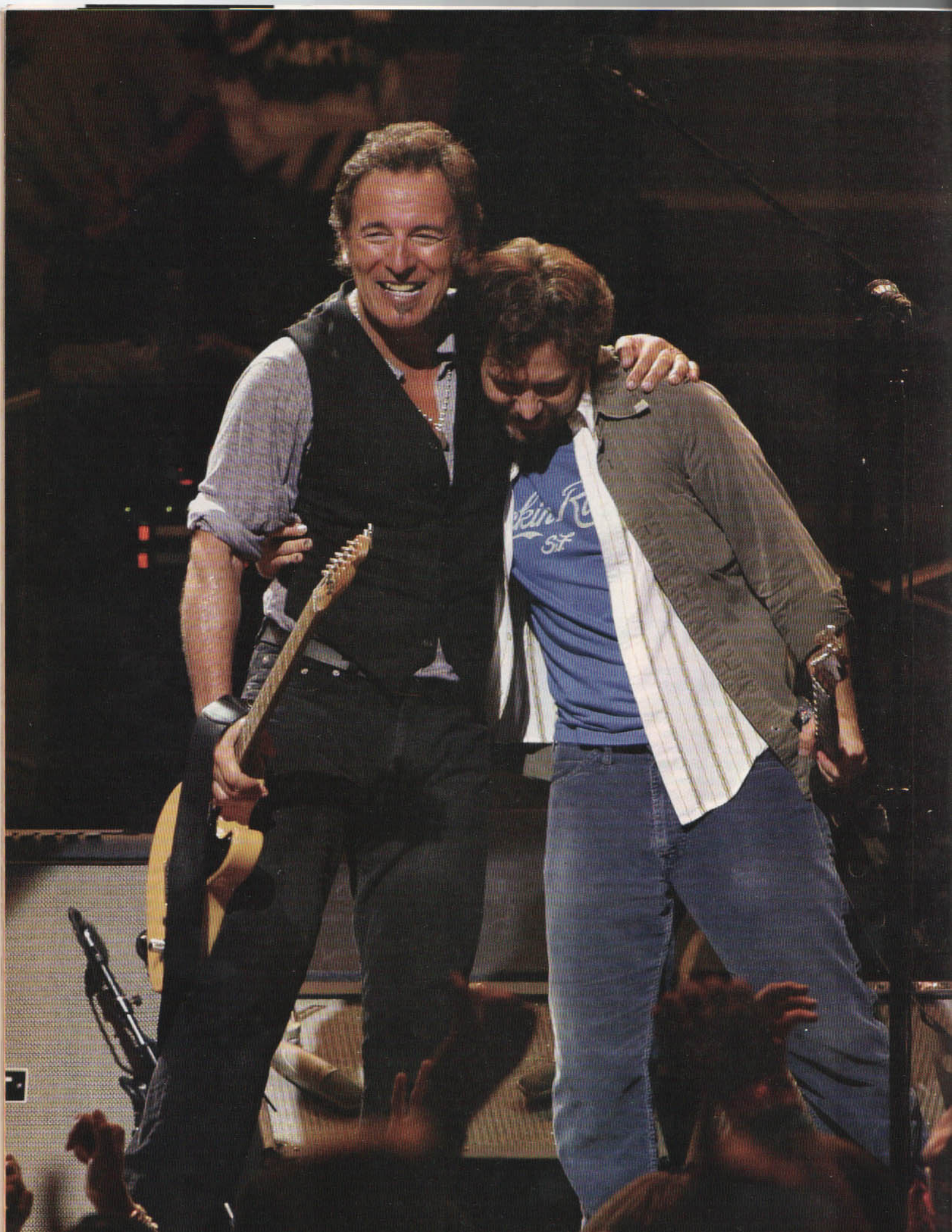
10/2: The One I Love/Animal/Leaving New York/Life and How to Live It/Cuyahoga/Final Straw/Imitation of Life/I Wanted to Be Wrong/Losing My Religion/Walk Unafraid/Bad Day (with Springsteen)/Man on the Moon (with Springsteen)

10/3: The One I Love/Animal/Exhuming McCarthy/Leaving New York/So Fast, So Numb/Final Straw/She Just Wants to Be/Wanderlust/Losing My Religion/Walk Unafraid/Bad Day (with Springsteen)/Man on the Moon (with Springsteen)

10/5: The One I Love/Begin the Begin/What's the Frequency, Kenneth?/Leaving New York/So Fast, So Numb/Final Straw/Country Feedback (with Neil Young)/Walk Unafraid/I Wanted to Be Wrong/Losing My Religion/Bad Day (with Springsteen)/Man on the Moon (with Springsteen)

10/8: The One I Love/What's the Frequency, Kenneth?/Begin the Begin/Leaving New York/Star 69/Final Straw/Country Feedback (with Nils Lofgren)/Walk Unafraid/Around the Sun/Losing My Religion/Permanent Vacation (with Springsteen)/Man on the Moon (with Springsteen)

10/11: The One I Love/Begin the Begin (with Eddie Vedder)/Leaving New York/Losing My Religion/Man on the Moon (with Springsteen)



"The Employee"

EDDIE VEDDER

Interview by Tim Donnelly

It's official: Eddie Vedder is now an "Honorary Jersey Guy." His induction into the club was cemented by his surprise appearance at the "real" Vote for Change finale on October 13 at the Continental Airlines Arena. The lifelong fan was more than stoked as he sang "Darkness on the Edge of Town" and "No Surrender" and traded verses with Bruce on Pearl Jam's "Better Man."

Besides the Vote for Change finale in Washington, DC two nights previous, the only other time Vedder and Springsteen shared a stage was in 2002, when the Evanston, Illinois native joined the E Street Band for "My Hometown" at Chicago's United Center.

Vedder has covered "Growin' Up," including a solo rendering at Pearl Jam's final show of their 2003 North American tour at the PNC Bank Arts Center in Holmdel. He also has a soft spot for Little Steven's "I Am a Patriot," a song that he has performed on numerous occasions worldwide.

The collaboration that went down in the Meadowlands on that Indian summer night in October was inevitable, and one can only think that more is yet to come from these two kindred souls.

Backstreets: What was it like for the Jersey Bruce crowd to be chanting your name?

Vedder: I guess that happened [laughs]. That's what I was told. I told Bruce and Patti before I went out, "Just to let you know, when I get out there, it's gonna look like I gained a bit of weight, but that's just gonna be the bulletproof vest under my T-shirt. I just want to be safe" [laughs]. There's a lot of energy happening on that stage—it's like being dropped into Waimea Bay from a helicopter, you have to hit the water paddling.

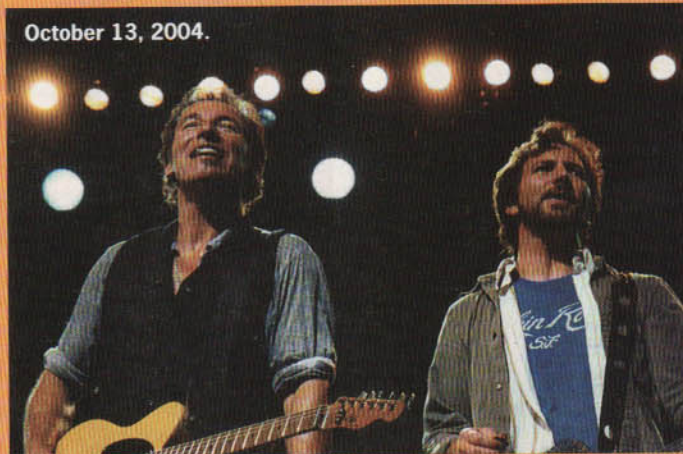
From that night on, I want to officially be known as "The Employee." Because he's "The Boss." From now on I can be the "The Employee." I will wear that moniker proudly [laughs].

It must have been heavy to have Bruce sing "Better Man" with you.

The nice thing is that he gave me the keys to the E Street Band, to take it around the track a few times. I got to ask Roy to play the piano at the beginning, and Clarence to play the sax at the end, and Danny to come on in the middle. Max knew all the fills, and Nils was helping me arrange. I'd like to think that I got into fifth gear. Of course, Bruce was standing right next to me. I probably had my foot on the clutch, but he was doing the gears [laughs]. I can't wait to hear it, it's gonna be nice to hear.

You've been covering "Growin' Up" for a little while now. Is Bruce's music something

October 13, 2004.



that you discovered later in life, or have you been a fan all along?

I might know half of Bruce's songs—and that's maybe a hundred songs. I've played them at campfires since I was a kid. It's interesting, when you play them with him; you realize these really intricate things in his phrasing. After knowing these songs, and then that there was more to be found, it's like little scenery that you didn't see all the other times that you drove that road.

It's like, "Oh, okay, that's there." Now I know why that is there at that point. I was maybe playing it one way, then learned the real way of playing it. You think you know something and you get to learn more about it, because you are actually there with the guy who wrote it. It's like Hank Aaron teaching you how to hit a home run.

You have also done Steve Van Zandt's "I Am a Patriot," which almost seemed like it could have been the theme song for the Vote for Change Tour.

Jackson and Little Steven did it in Jersey and it was great, a reggae version. It's interesting, there's a kind of ambivalence to that song. "I believe in my country, 'cause it's all I know." I think about that a lot too, because growing up... I mean, I didn't even make it to New York City until I was in my mid-20s, when we first had a record. I certainly didn't know about getting out of the country. I never really studied geography in high school. Maybe it was naive, or me just trying to get out of my studies, but I knew I just was never going to get there, you know? As much as I was interested, I was interested in American Indians and the history of this country. As far as other countries, I thought that I was destined for a job at Longs Drugs, and that was going to be okay.

After having been to half of the world and seeing that there are great places to live and

communities in foreign countries where they really have their shit together in certain issues, you realize that this country really is in a certain kind of adolescence. We are like privileged adolescents, and we don't have the maturity of other countries.

It's a touchy subject when you bring it up. It's like you are an expatriate because you don't believe that we have the best thing going. Well, we do have 7-11s, and we can

get a truck tire changed at four in the morning—in Rome it might take you a week. But that's a week of talking, eating, drinking, and enjoying yourself. It rings true when you get to other places and people: they work so they can live, and here we've ended up in situation where we are living to work.

When I grew up, the father worked and the mom didn't. Then we got rights for women to work, and now it turns into that they have to work. We have to shlep our kids off to a stranger and let a stranger raise them during the days; we have to get a two-income family to keep our shit together. I'm just trying to say that you see positive things about other places in the world—there's nothing anti-patriotic about saying that we can be better and that maybe we have lost the plot in certain areas.

One thing we need to focus on is all the jobs going to other countries, which has been going on for ten years. They say we need to keep an even playing field and invite other nations to work with us, and we are just opening the door for corporations to send American jobs elsewhere. We call AT&T and we are talking to someone in India. I have friends in Pakistan, but I don't know if this is the right thing for America. ➔

Tim Donnelly writes for *Harp*, *Relix*, *Surfing*, *Asbury Park Press*, *NJ Monthly*, *Hooked on the Outdoors*, *Eastern Surf*, *NY Press*, *New York Sports Express*, *City Link* (South Florida), *Slammed*, and *Unlimited*.

Next Issue:

FOGERTY
THE BACKSTREETS INTERVIEW

BANDS OF BROTHERS: SPRINGSTEEN'S VFC TOUR MATES

SINGING INTO THE WIND?

Author Bryan Garman puts Vote for Change into historical context

By Roderick Jones

Over the course of the recent campaign season, Bruce Springsteen voiced his political views at concerts and campaign rallies, from the pages of his website, the *New York Times*, and even *Backstreets*. His foray into presidential politics sparked controversy, with some expressing surprise or disappointment at his partisanship. But for historian Dr. Bryan Garman, it's been a long time coming. In Garman's 2000 book, *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen*, he makes the case that Springsteen has long been an activist for the workingman's political agenda. Today Garman is an upper school principal and history teacher at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC. After the election, *Backstreets* caught up with Garman to find out his take on the significance of the Boss' role in the campaign, his place in history, and whether there are any new members in the "race of singers."

Backstreets: First of all, what are you up to these days? Are you writing or mostly teaching?

Garman: I'm spending a lot of time being an administrator. I teach a senior seminar called the History of Gender and Sexuality in the United States, and actually, we talk about Springsteen in that class.

How do your students respond to Springsteen—is he a figure from the past, or is he very much in the present for them?

A lot of kids know who he is, but they're not necessarily familiar with his music. I think that I've probably created a few Springsteen fans as a result of the course [laughs]. Because we are a Quaker School, we tend to have a lot of people who are politically engaged, and parents who are politically engaged. I think a lot of the parents happen to be Springsteen fans, so kids are listening to him in their homes.

What was your reaction to the Vote for Change tour, and of Springsteen singing and speaking as John Kerry's opening act on the campaign trail?

I thought it was a logical extension of the work that Springsteen's been doing. To me it was interesting that there was a hullabaloo about him suddenly participating in partisan politics, because it seems to me that he's been very political at least since *Born in the USA*. I mean, he did the *No Nukes* concert [in 1979], so he started to have that political consciousness there. If you look at the public statements that he's made, I think he's always been—at least since '84 or so—very politically engaged. And although he didn't necessarily support a particular candidate, he was certainly

speaking out against Reagan, and against the first George Bush. So it just seemed to me to be an important, but really small, step to take.

You mentioned the hullabaloo. There seems to be an element in our society that would ridicule someone like Springsteen for using the stage to speak his mind about current events, or saying something provocative. Do you think that our expectation of what the artist is supposed to do has changed over time? Did Woody Guthrie or Bob Dylan have people at their concerts yelling, "Shut up and sing!"?

Woody was never as popular as Springsteen is, so it's slightly different. He also had a really clear political movement in which he was participating, the Popular Front—this sort of liberal, anti-racist, pro-labor coalition. So he had a lot of fellow travelers with him, and there was a more pronounced leftist culture in the 1930s and '40s.

So maybe one of the differences is the popularity level—Woody was preaching to the choir, and Springsteen is preaching to everyone since his audience is so much larger and more diverse?

I think some people say, well, how is Springsteen qualified to address issues such as this? And I think there's a sense in which he's just a popular entertainer, as opposed to an artist, or as opposed to people seeing him as an engaged intellectual. So the types of things that Springsteen has done recently, such as writing that piece in the *New York Times*—something like that is much more similar to what Woody Guthrie was doing as well. Woody was singing, but he was also writing and publishing in papers. So there's a way in which

Springsteen is pushing himself out to be more consciously engaged.

But your question about whether the role of the artist has changed, that's true. It may have more to do with our popular artists being more embedded in networks of commercialism in a way that Guthrie wasn't. Maybe it's harder to take them seriously.

Maybe it's not so much the artist [that has changed], but the concept of Americanism or patriotism. There were really important discussions going on in the 1930s and 1940s about what it meant to be an American, and the Right had not yet captured patriotism as part of its political rhetoric. Now I think that patriotism is associated mostly with conservative politics in this country. Springsteen has had to work very hard to distance himself from that—to still be talking about America, to still be critical of it, to still be talking about patriotism, and at the same time be articulating a point of view that's counter to a conservative point of view.

Given that Kerry lost, was the Vote for Change tour just a news item, or is there a deeper meaning in it for us as a society?

I think it's too early to tell. I mean, it depends on whether this is going to be a prolonged and persistent movement. Social change doesn't happen without a movement taking place. It's hard to measure the political success of an artist, but there were points in the generations of both Guthrie and Bob Dylan where there were larger social movements, where they were part of something that was much larger than a little tour for change. Who else is going to help, and where is the rest of the audience for these artists? If you don't have that, it's sort of like singing into the wind. The interest-

Madison, WI, October 28, 2004.



LUCIAN PERKINS / THE WASHINGTON POST PHOTO

ing question is, why is there not a significant and sustained anti-war movement right now?

Is the Iraq War shaping up similarly to the Vietnam War on the home front when it comes to music and that idea of a movement?

It doesn't feel like it to me. There are plenty of people who are critical of the war, but I don't see major movements against the war—at least, we're not seeing it in the media. Why is that? I don't know. Springsteen has spoken about this to some extent, that dissent is not popular. I think there's a way in which 9/11 has operated to squash critical discussion about the country or about its policies. That event has perhaps changed the way people respond to war. We didn't have that kind of experience whenever we were looking at Vietnam.

Let me read you a sentence out of your book that I wanted to ask you about. "Because these heroes [Guthrie and Springsteen] believed that the original vision on which the Republic was founded was unflawed, they frequently located corruption and injustice in immoral individuals rather than questioning the political system itself." Are there any "working class heroes," as you call them, on the scene today who are taking it a step further?

It's hard to find them, and given my job now, I haven't had time to go out looking for them [laughs].

What I think is interesting, at least over the past couple of years, has been the way that the image and the legacy of the working class hero has been broadened and embraced by people like Ani DiFranco, whose music isn't linked to a working class consciousness, but is very much a part of a political consciousness. I think that's where this legacy has landed right now. Part of it has to do with the changing of our notions of the working class itself. We have an economy that's not necessarily based on manufacturing anymore. So the image that goes with the blue-collar production job, that sort of manly image that Springsteen has represented for so long, has changed significantly. It's not such an iconic part of our nation anymore.

Kids, and especially the group of kids that I'm teaching—middle-class kids in Washington, DC—their consciousness isn't about working class. It tends to be more about gender politics, about issues of race. When they start to make connections back to that tradition, they're making it through people like Ani DiFranco, maybe the Indigo Girls, and people like that. It's become a broader political tradition now, in a way that addresses issues of freedom and equality on a more national and global scale.

About legacies, when you're writing about Guthrie's legacy you suggest that how he is remembered and how his contributions are classified depends on whom you ask. Do you think that Springsteen's legacy will be as complicated?

I think that Springsteen has made a very self-conscious effort to sharpen his politics over the last 20 years. Any time you put something in commercial culture you run the risk of it being mis-

interpreted. But Springsteen, at least since the *Joad* tour, has made it a point to identify what his songs are about. I think that he will be seen as somebody who has made a significant contribution to the political consciousness of the country, and to the spiritual and artistic consciousness. I think he's embraced that role.

Whitman and Guthrie both wrote about what they saw to be the most important issues of their day. Whitman wrote extensively about the Civil War and what that meant to the country. Guthrie was very much engaged in World War II. And I think it makes sense that Springsteen is going to come out and talk about 9/11 and now the extension of what happened on 9/11, with the military and the nationalistic fervor that's followed. There's that story that he tells: somebody just sees him on the street and says, "We need you now." That's very much the way that Whitman saw himself and the way Guthrie saw himself. And I think that Springsteen sees himself that way, too. What is really interesting to me is that he has decided to embrace that in a way that Dylan did for a short time, then rejected.

What did you think of *The Rising*?

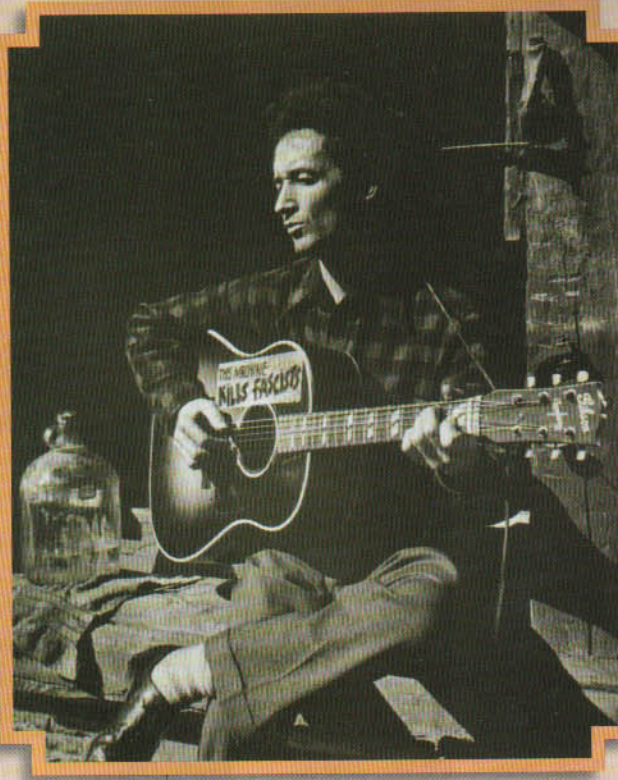
I think it's a little uneven. I think "My City of Ruins" is a wonderful song, but the album version for me wasn't quite as powerful as that version that he did on the *Tribute to Heroes*, which I think is one of the finest performances he's ever done. I think that "The Rising" is a wonderful song. Basically I think it's an album that he needed to write at the time. I think there will be four or five songs on that album that might endure.

I ask because about *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, you wrote that sometimes when Springsteen steps outside of his own experience, the result can be a little bit clumsy. I wondered if the more recent songs, like what was on *The Rising*, or even "American Skin"...

Yeah, I don't think that's his best work. "American Skin" reminded me of some of the songs on *Tom Joad*. I applaud the effort to address that issue, and I think the idea of "American Skin" is very interesting, but for what it's worth [laughs], I thought it was a little awkward. I find some of the songs such as "Into the Fire" a little awkward. Although at times beautiful, I find them sometimes to be a little forced.

One of the things I'm taking away from this is that Springsteen's myth is still malleable, and the things that he's doing now are going to make a difference in how he's portrayed in the future.

I think that's right. There's a great picture on the cover of the *Post* of him playing in front of this sea



COURTESY OF THE WOODY GUTHRIE FOUNDATION AND ARCHIVES

of Kerry signs. There was something about that, to me, that had a real vibrancy to it. He's become increasingly comfortable in being able to express his politics. If you look at interviews that took place during the *Born in the U.S.A.* tour, and say, the interviews that appeared on *Nightline* after he wrote *The Rising*, there's a real difference in the way he speaks about politics and the way he presents himself. He presents himself in a much more sophisticated manner now when he's talking about politics. He's writing in a much more sophisticated manner.

What's going to be interesting is to see what the next album is. Does *Vote for Change* stop with the election? He has the ability to decide where it's going to go. He's at a place in his career where he is the elder statesman of politically conscious music. Even though a lot of people on that tour have been playing politically conscious music for a long time—Jackson Browne, for example—Springsteen has been able to posit himself as an authentic figure of integrity in all this. He can't do it all by himself—there has to be some other consciousness that happens. But I do think that he can continue to shape people's lives, and he's been doing it for a long time.

The picture on the cover of your book shows Woody playing the guitar that has "This Machine Kills Fascists" written on it. If Bruce had something on his guitar, what would it say?

I think back to something that he used to say before he would do "Born to Run" on the *Born in the U.S.A.* tour. He would say, "Remember that in the end, nobody wins unless everybody wins." I think that's been a real tenet of his, at least since that time, something that he's been interested in creating.

Yeah, "nobody wins unless everybody wins"—I think that sums up his work. 🐾

MEET ME OUT ON THE STUMP

By Andrew E. Massimino

This wasn't any concert-for-a-cause. This wasn't a fundraiser with other artists for an issue-driven organization that could not legally support a candidate or tell you how to vote. No, this was something different. This was, quite simply, a man who wanted to take a stand, who wanted to do all that he could because he felt a very strong sense of purpose. Bruce Springsteen, like 49% of the other voters in this country, wanted George W. Bush out of office. One difference between Bruce and most of those other 58 million Americans is that Springsteen is a "public figure" who happens to have a platform when he straps a guitar on his back. And this time he intended to use it.

In a move that left his fans on both sides of the political aisle (and even those with little political interest) wondering how in the world we got here, Bruce Springsteen became a major political player in the 2004 Presidential election. He appeared at four enormous rallies in three battleground states over the last week of the campaign, speaking out, singing songs, and ultimately, introducing Candidate Kerry. For a man who had never publicly endorsed a political candidate on any level in more than 30 years of public life, it was a hell of a stepping-off point. In what we were told, ad nauseum, was "the most important election of our lifetime," Springsteen was right there, front and center as the nasty, divisive, and tightly-contested race wound through its final days. And no matter for whom they were voting, Springsteen fans around the globe were amazed at the spectacle.

On October 28, 2004, in what was billed as a "Fresh Start for America Rally," close to 80,000 people swarmed the streets of Madison, WI to join Bruce Springsteen (as well as the Foo Fighters) in supporting John Kerry and his bid for the Presidency. Springsteen claimed the



LUCIAN PERKINS/THE WASHINGTON POST PHOTO

stage wearing an open shirt, sport coat, and jeans and carrying a black acoustic guitar.

"It looks like Senator Kerry draws a pretty big crowd," Bruce mused.

The Madison event was the largest at the time—by a long shot—for either candidate, and the logical assumption was that the man who has filled football stadiums with adoring fans was largely responsible.

Springsteen strummed softly and spoke eloquently of his reasons for being there, expanding themes he had previously engaged during the Vote for Change tour and in his oft-quoted editorial penned for the *New York Times*. He played harmonica while delivering thoughtful versions of "The Promised Land" and "No Surrender," the latter now serving as the theme song for the Kerry campaign.

Playing the role of a modern-day Woody Guthrie, Springsteen calmly focused his speech on his own interpretations of American ideals and basic human principles. This was not a rousing, fist-pumping, "Kerry is the man!" kind of stump speech. Given such a prominent spot in one of the most heated (and most expensive) political battles ever, Springsteen mentioned

Senator Kerry exactly twice, attempting rather to connect his own ideas for "the country that we carry in our hearts" with his support for the Senator. There were no "Bush must go" rants or even a mention of the President's name. Perhaps the most telling phrase in his five-minute introduction of the Senator summed up the bottom-line difference, in Bruce's view, between the two candidates: "Senator Kerry... has an informed and adult view of America and her people."

After the introduction and the obligatory hugs and waves, Springsteen left the stage to get a better view of the candidate himself. He strolled behind the crowd and surprised a few of the rally-watchers by taking them up on their invitation to join them for a cold beer on their balcony. Springsteen got a good vantage point to watch Kerry's speech, and a dozen or so Madison folks got a story for life.

Later that evening, in Columbus, OH, the rally was reprised to about 60,000 people—roughly the size of a Giants Stadium show. Parts of both events were carried live on cable news channels, local channels, and C-SPAN. Local and national papers gave front-page coverage the following day, and websites large and small were abuzz with the celebrity factor in the tight race. The website CNN.com reported that "one day after the Boss drew crowds of 80,000 in the capitals of Wisconsin and Ohio, Camp Kerry hastily scheduled another event in Miami... (Kerry aides tell CNN's Kelly Wallace that this was Bruce's idea, not theirs.)" And the *Miami Herald* reported that Bruce "told the Massachusetts senator that he doesn't want 'to wake up Wednesday'—the day after the election—and wish he could have done more."

Speculation regarding Springsteen's effect on the election was popular as well. This humorous poll originated from Paula Zahn's CNN show: "Who do you think has a better chance at winning more votes for their candidate,

Kerry's Place: Rally Setlists

10/28, Madison, WI

The Promised Land/No Surrender

10/28, Columbus, OH

The Promised Land/No Surrender

10/29, Miami, FL

The Promised Land/No Surrender

11/1, Cleveland, OH

The Promised Land/Thunder Road/
No Surrender

Arnold Schwarzenegger or Bruce Springsteen?" Sadly, Conan the Governor beat out the Last of the Hardcore Troubadours, 56 to 44 percent. Perhaps a telling sign.

Still, it didn't stop the dynamic duo of Springsteen and Kerry... er, Kerry and Springsteen... from scheduling one last, election-eve blowout appearance together in Cleveland. Ohio had been tapped early in the campaign as a key battleground state, and later proved to be the key battleground state. The Vote for Change tour had passed through only one month prior, and the town that hosts the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame had always been kind to the Boss.

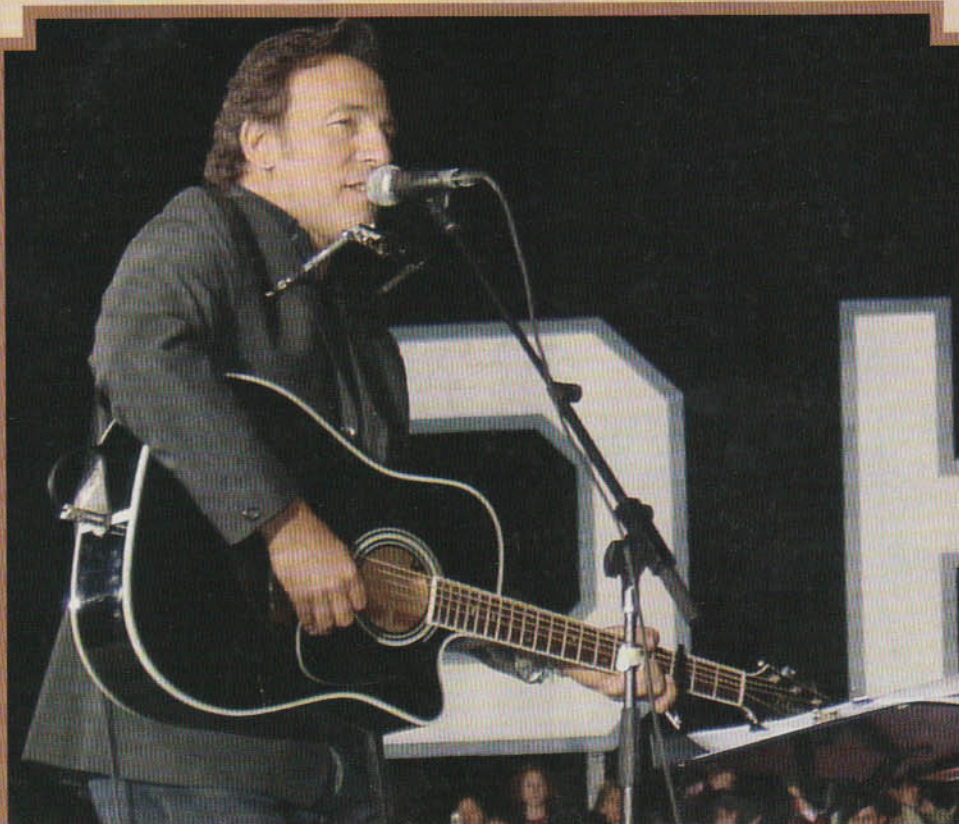
Again, the numbers were staggering—as were many of the people jammed into the outdoor malls near City Hall. Some waited more than six hours, standing in the cold just to hear a few songs and be part of history. The rally site was the same spot where Kerry and running mate John Edwards first appeared together on the stump. Now it was the Bruce and Kerry show, with Springsteen given time to work a third song, "Thunder Road," into his mini-set intro. The song was dedicated to Kristen Breitweiser, one of the 9/11 widows who worked hard to get the Administration to co-operate with the 9/11 Commission. Playing on the crisp and windy night, Springsteen had trouble with his music stand and song notes, but his message was stronger and clearer than ever. He expanded his speech to include a few more Kerry references, but it read more and more like "America: The Essay" by Bruce Springsteen. In a line that brought enormous cheers, Springsteen pleaded for "an open government that's unburdened by unnecessary secrecy." The words were direct and eloquent, inspiring and forthright. And the effect was immediate. Overheard more than once from rally-goers: "I wish we could vote for him!"

As Senator Kerry took the stage and the sea of campaign signs bobbed in the crowd, Springsteen passed him that night's guitar pick and apparently said, "Take this to the White House." Kerry thanked Springsteen genuinely from the stage—and not just for the pick—calling him "a great poet (who) sings from his heart... we love him."

As the Senator moved on to promote his positions and put the finishing touches on his lengthy campaign, one couldn't help but wonder if Bruce might close out "the show" with one more song. But that's not how it works in politics. Problem was... how did any of us know that? Never before had such a major artist connected his songs and ideals to a political candidate, on such a grand scale, at such a crucial time in our nation's history.

Even with Bruce's social involvements over the years (and his more recent outspokenness), longtime Springsteen fans had to be awed by the events of late October and early November 2004. Our guy, the same one who sang about "wizard imps and sweat sock pimps, interstellar mongrel nymphs" found himself leading the charge for a U.S. Senator bidding for the highest office in the land.

We've come a long way, baby. 🐉



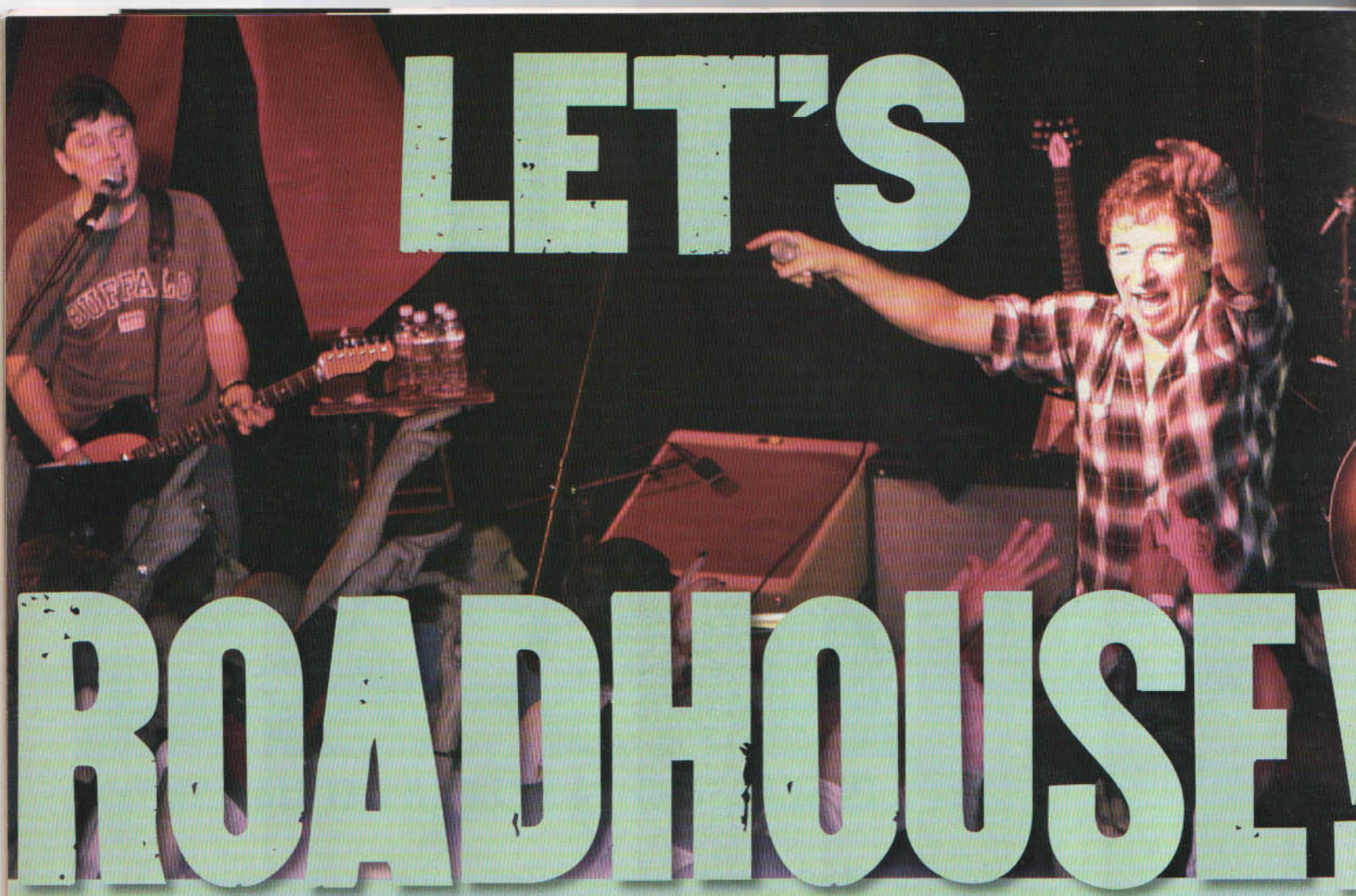
IN SEARCH OF "A DEEPER PATRIOTISM"

November 1, 2004 ★ Cleveland, OH

As a songwriter, I've been writing about America for 30 years: who we are, what we stand for, what we fight for—these ideas are what's at stake tomorrow. I believe our American government has drifted too far from American values: The human principles of economic justice, healing the sick, health care, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, a living wage so folks don't have to break their backs and then come home and not be able to make ends meet, an open American government that's unburdened by unnecessary secrecy, protection of our environment, a sane and responsible foreign policy where we take our place amongst a community of nations, civil rights and the safeguarding of our precious Democracy here at home. This is what we're fighting for tomorrow. Now, nobody's got all of the answers to all of America's problems. And when John Kerry wins tomorrow, it's just the beginning of the work that we need to do ourselves to create a humane American society. I got involved in this election because I saw the opportunity to have somebody in the White House with a heart that would honestly ask the hard questions, that would respect our most struggling citizens, and a spirit that would seek the solutions to bring us closer to fulfilling America's promise for everybody. I believe that Senator Kerry honors these ideals, and that he'll work for them. He's lived our history over the past 50 years; he has an informed and adult view of America and her people. He's had the life experience and understands that we as humans are not infallible, we make mistakes. And as Senator Edwards said during the Democratic Convention, "struggle and heartbreak will always be with us." That's why we need each other; that's why we need to be able to depend on and keep faith with one another through hard times and good times. That's why "One Nation Indivisible" and "United We Stand" can't become empty slogans, but need to remain guiding principles of our public policy.

I was speaking to Senator Glenn the other night, and he said "politics is supposed to be the Personnel Department of the Constitution." It is supposed to be a shining service. And that's why we need good, wise, and trustworthy servants to put our ideals in action. Senator Kerry, since he was a young man, has shown us by having the courage to face America's hard truths, both the good and the bad, that that's where we find a deeper patriotism, a more complete view of who we are, a more authentic experience as citizens, and the power that is embedded only in truth to make our world a better and safer place for our kids to grow up in. These are the things that have brought me here tonight.

Paul Wellstone, the Minnesota senator, said, "The future is for the passionate and those that are willing to fight and work hard for it." Well, the future is now. It's time to roll up your sleeves and let your passions flow in the service of a more just and equitable society. That's why I'm here to stand alongside Senator Kerry and to tell you that the country we carry in our hearts is waiting. So tomorrow, get Grandma, get Ma, get Pa, get 'em all out there and vote! We've had a sax player; I think it's time for a guitar player in the White House. Go out there tomorrow and Vote for Change!



LET'S

ROADHOUSE

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS, SPRINGSTEEN TELLS FANS, "MEET ME AT HARRY'S PLACE!"

For most Springsteen fans, seeing Bruce in a club, preferably on the Jersey Shore, still remains a highly prized event. The club shows, after all, are the stuff of legend: cover versions brought out, rarities dusted off, Bruce relaxed and loose, in a small venue. For his 2004 holiday shows, it seemed like we were going to get the best of both worlds: a club show, combined with the now-traditional Asbury Park Christmas shows, for two Holiday Jams with Bruce Springsteen and Friends at Harry's Roadhouse on December 19. However, anyone with fantasies that Bruce would let loose and turn the shows (especially the late show) into a three-hour cover-and-audible ruled extravaganza, with special guests ranging from Bob Dylan to Carole King, was probably already too far into their Christmas eggnog. Still, with a capacity of 500, these were to be the smallest billed Bruce Springsteen shows since the 1970s, and anticipation was high (to say the least) for what turned out to be a great experience and a lot of fun.

The day of the shows was presented as an event, with Asbury merchants promising to remain open until 11 p.m., Cookman Avenue closed to vehicle traffic, and food vendors set up outside, giving the feeling of a street fair. There were even strong rumors that speakers would be set up so the unlucky ticketless could still hear the show. Well, the speakers were set up, but the street fair ended up being two cheese steak guys and

another lonely zeppole stand, and the ticketless crowd didn't look like more than a few dozen people. To be fair, it was a long way to go just to stand in the street on a cold day and listen; the weather forecasts, promising snowstorms, probably didn't help. All that the street speakers did was ruin any surprises for the ticketholders for the 8:30 p.m. show, who had no choice but to wait in line as the official stated line-up procedure

was once again disregarded the day of show as numbered lists and check-ins were instituted by fans. (In the drop line, on the other hand, the list was rejected by staff and people were chosen on a completely random basis.)

It seems that this year, Bruce has been testing the range of his influence: from a national scope with the Vote for Change tour, to very local with this spontaneous event. How many fans would travel down to Asbury Park, bringing much-needed foot traffic and commerce to the burgeoning downtown core? The contest received

over 35,000 entries by the time it ended at 5 p.m. on December 18. That's 35,000 chances for ten tickets. "Santa Claus says you guys have been very good to Asbury this year," Bruce acknowledged, as he took the

Christmas Jam at the Roadhouse
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
WITH BOBBY BANDIERA & FRIENDS

Harry's Roadhouse
462 Cookman Avenue
Asbury Park, NJ

Nº 1561

(Please Print)

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone #1 _____

Telephone #2 _____

E-Mail _____



BY GLENN RADECKI AND CARYN ROSE

stage for the 4:30 p.m. show. Most Asbury merchants were grateful for the extra traffic in town; the owner of Harry's was quoted in local media as saying that his business had tripled since the shows had been announced. (Just a note: if that were the case, the need to charge \$4 for a soda during the show was somewhat questionable. Clubs in Manhattan don't charge that much.)

At approximately 4:45 p.m., Bruce came out alone, with his black Takamine acoustic guitar. Simply clad in jeans frayed at the hems and dragging on the floor, untucked plaid flannel shirt, and black tank top, he looked like he'd just gotten up from watching television, got in his car, and drove down to the gig. Echoing the introduction of the Pittsburgh Flood Aid show, Bruce began the first set with three acoustic numbers: "Does This Bus Stop at 82nd Street?," "Wild Billy's Circus Story," and "This Hard Land." Bruce seemed almost shy and self-conscious, not making eye contact. Prior to "Bus Stop," he welcomed the audience and thanked them for their patronage in Asbury over the past few weeks, and he asked everyone to please note where the fire exits were: "We plan to set this place on fire tonight!"

After "This Hard Land," the band [see sidebar] entered and took their places on the small stage. From the first note, Bruce visibly brightened up. The first few rockers—the Chuck Berry classic "Run Rudolph Run," "From Small Things" and "Two Hearts"—seemed to serve as a warm-up for the band. Bruce generously doled out solos on the Chuck Berry number—the first to Bobby Bandiera, the second to the horns—but a third was reserved for the Gunslinger of Central New Jersey, who certainly lived up to that title during this first show. "Two Hearts" was notable for Bobby's valiant attempt to carry Stevie's vocal harmonies.

"Are the bars open?" Bruce inquired after that number. "I need a small shot of whiskey!" He waved at the audience near the bar, and instructed them to "tip those bartenders." This led into a great, tight version of "Rendezvous," highlighted by Bruce singing the "I know that you like me, too" line at a gentleman in the front (presumably because there weren't many women near the stage). At the end of the song, the requested whiskey

arrived, and Bruce imbibed, leading him into a lengthy dialogue with the audience, as he inquired where everyone was from. "San Diego? That's a long way," he nodded appreciatively. "Philly? We got people from Philly in the house?" And then, "Dublin? Man, you guys will go anywhere for a good time. I have something for you later, wait for it." (The something would turn out to be a green Santa Claus hat, complete with embroidered shamrock.) Finally—"Japan? Man, you guys go everywhere. I never leave the house..." This exchange illustrated a factor that was one of the undeniable treats of these shows: Bruce was able to carry on an actual conversation with a crowd that wasn't drowned out by shouted song requests or Brooocing.

And with the stage so low (it was barely at mid-calf height), he was also easily able to make direct eye contact with the audience, with continual winks and smiles and nods throughout the night—he acted like any good club musician would, interacting with the audience. There was no barrier of crowd size or stage height or distance.

An early surprise in the set was the performance of "Further On (Up the Road)." Virtually ignored on the *Rising* tour, the few

previous live performances of the song were disappointments; few traces of the album version could be found in what was typically a slow, plodding performance. At Harry's Roadhouse, the band rocked the song as it had never been before, complete with a loud, powerful drum introduction and yet more inspired guitar playing from Bruce. With the restored tempo and enthusiastic performance, "Further On" stood out as a particular highlight of both shows.

"This is a song I wrote for Southside Johnny," Bruce said before launching into "Talk to Me," conducting the band on the intro. He decided to let the opening riff repeat a bit, glancing over and noticing that the televisions in the bar were still on, broadcasting some gymnastics event. "I've always wanted to watch television while I played," Bruce shared, laughing. "This is how I warm up,"

he joked, waiting for the gymnast to execute a perfect landing before launching into the song.

Bruce must be a cheap drunk, because he was getting silly and doing the rolling hand moves during "Talk to Me" on maybe a quarter-shot of whiskey. Towards the end of the song, he was prowling the edge of the stage, going into soul singer mode, and invoking the "Are you ready?" call-and-response a la "Mary's Place," which the crowd responded to warmly. "It's fun being in a club," he murmured after the song ended, finishing the shot of whiskey. This led us into a fantastic, easygoing "Spirit in the Night," which featured a tremendous saxophone performance by Joey Stann. Although in the past, Bruce has enjoyed somewhat *tactile* audience interaction during this particular number, he didn't lie down on the stage or venture into the crowd during this song at Harry's; there were no hijinks as during the Providence show of the *Rising* tour. But the song was enhanced by a seemingly spontaneous guitar outro played by Bruce. In a rare instance of true public improvisation, Bruce played a funky pattern of notes during a solo that he couldn't seem to figure out how to end, laughing and shaking it off as he managed to wind it to a close.

After a brief mention of the beneficiaries of the shows, Bruce murmured to the band, "Wanna try it?" "It" turned out to be "All That Heaven Will Allow," performed with a band for the first time since 1988. With Bruce on electric guitar



COASTER NEWS/MIKE JONES PHOTOS

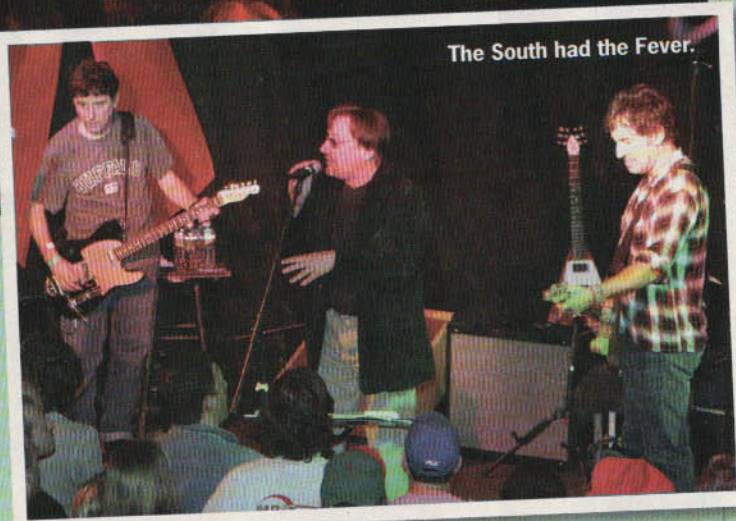


COASTER NEWS/MIKE JONES PHOTOS

and Bobby Bandiera on acoustic, the song built slowly, up to a point when Bruce even took a short guitar solo before singing the third verse a second time. Given the setting of the show, it was a perfectly appropriate choice, with the "Say hey there Mister Bouncer" and "C'mon, Slim, slip me in, man" lyrics. The song even had an audience sing-along so loud that Bruce appeared stunned (yet pleased). The venue-appropriate songs continued with "Seaside Bar Song" (demerits if it hadn't been present), which led into "Waitin' on a Sunny Day," with the drums starting the song, and the horns playing the violin riff.

Considering that Bruce was backed by a band that consisted of most of the Asbury Jukes, it was surprising that Southside Johnny didn't make an appearance for "Talk to Me." He did come out after "Sunny Day," to duet with Bruce on "The Fever." Southside wasn't in the best of voice (he had been on the road the past few nights and was sick), but Bruce's solo was nothing short of incendiary, and the call-and-response between Southside on harp and Bruce on gee-tar was an undisputed highlight of the show.

"Alright, a little slap, a little slap on this," Bruce requested, and then he started joking: "It's fast." [pause] "I'm not gonna count, it starts real quick." [pause] "Band has got to be



ready for this one." Boom! "This one" turned out to be "Stand on It," which took everyone's breath away, segueing into "Darlington County." With song choices such as these obviously influenced by the setting, one can only wonder where "Ramrod" was—especially given that the show was at a place called Harry's Roadhouse.

Drummer on the hi-hat, we were about to take a trip down Tenth Avenue, but Bruce called a halt and pointed out that it wasn't next on the setlist. What was? "Bobby Jean." It's great that this is such a meaningful song to Bruce, but it was the ultimate momentum killer at that point in the show. Then, instead of following the setlist and going back into "Tenth Avenue," he instead called for an acoustic and the harmonica rack, and he serenaded the crowd with a lovely version of "If I Should Fall Behind." Again, lovely to be sure, but it was an odd choice in the set, considering that it was the

end of the set, we were all waiting for "Tenth Avenue," and the horn players had nothing to do meanwhile except clean out their spit valves.

Finally, after the acoustic interlude, we were treated to what can only be described as an old-school version of "Tenth Avenue," thanks to the presence of the horn section. As Bruce sang the "Big Man joined the band" lyric, he gave a quick salute to the song's absent star. Bruce even went out into the crowd to sing the final part of the song (twice during the second show). Then it was "Santa Claus" (complete with a Santa with no throwing arm—given the short-stops winging candy canes at previous holiday shows, perhaps a blessing in disguise) and in an obvious change in tradition, the show closed with the now-familiar "Peace, Love and Understanding," preceded by the usual invocation we've been hearing for a while now, closing the early set.

The second show's setlist was virtually identical to the first, performed in much the same fashion.

This should not have been a surprise, because most of the backing band had been in Cleveland the night before, accompanying Southside. As a result, the ensemble had no rehearsal to speak of—only a brief soundcheck consisting of just a few numbers. While Bruce viewed this as an impressive feat (as he specifically mentioned it during the band introduction), it seems a shame that he didn't view the \$100 price of the tickets, the lengths necessary to obtain them, and the charity nature of the show, worth at least one rehearsal. (Similarly, given the ordeal necessary to attend, it seems incomprehensible that so many in the crowd would talk through so many songs.

Springsteen rotated different songs into the acoustic set: the strange pairing of "For You" and "Working on the Highway." Bruce's performance of "For You" was strong and included the instrumental ending to the song, and "Working on the Highway" was a crowd favorite, yet the two songs back-to-back could most favorably be described as what in radio jargon is known as "a trainwreck." Still, "Working" remains an evergreen audience favorite.

The evening performance was notably looser than the afternoon show—having performed the material once before, the band's performance was more polished, and Bruce was becoming more comfortable with the musicians around him. For fans of Bruce's guitar playing, this had unfortunate effects, as he was more comfortable passing off solos to Bobby Bandiera and Kevin Kavanaugh on keyboards rather than performing them himself. On the whole, Bruce's guitar work was far less notable the second time around.

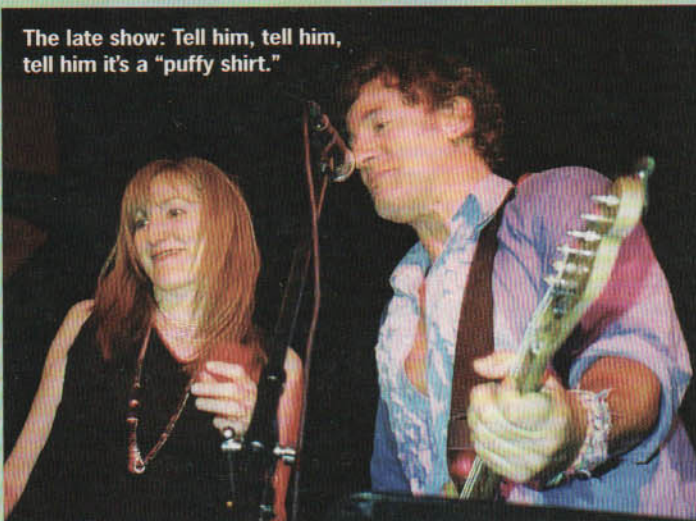
E Street was represented during the evening performance, with Patti Scialfa joining the band a number of times, starting with vocal harmonies on "Spirit in the Night." Her biggest contributions were on two highlights from the second show: a duet with Bruce on "It Takes Two" and lead vocals on "Tell Him." Following "All That Heaven Will Allow," a song for which Patti was strangely not

present, she joined Bruce at the front of the stage as the two of them hilariously attempted to sort out what song they would in fact be performing, and who would be singing which parts. "It Takes Two" showcased Mr. and Mrs. Springsteen together on stage in a sweet manner not typically seen by fans. Bruce was beaming during Patti's time in the spotlight, particularly during her excellent version of "Tell Him." Bruce even wandered over to one of the other microphones to join in on the backing vocals at one point.

The other special guest at the second show was Max Weinberg, taking over on drums for "Seaside Bar Song" and playing the balance of the show. With Max's reported injury seen as a possible reason for the lack of the "standard" Christmas shows at Convention Hall, it was a treat to see Max on stage with Bruce, and he was warmly welcomed by the crowd. "He broke his collarbone, but he don't need it!" Bruce exclaimed.

The loose atmosphere continued as Bruce showcased his percussion skills (on the sleigh bells) during "Merry Christmas, Baby," and then granted one of the most improbable audience requests in years, playing "Hava Nagila." Many cheers were heard as it became evident what exactly the band was playing. The crowd clapped along (some even sang) as

The late show: Tell him, tell him, tell him it's a "puffy shirt."



the song went on for about 90 seconds before Bruce cut it off, commenting that "these boys have got their wedding chops together!"

The clear highlight of the second show was Bruce's audible call of "The Fever," late in the set. With Southside out sick, Bruce took all of the lyrics in a vastly improved version of the song from the early performance. Bruce passed solos off to the keyboards and sax before taking over with a scorching guitar solo unlike any other during the show.

The venue and the format may have changed this year, but there's no denying that Bruce and friends successfully brought the spirit of the season to Asbury Park yet

again. The Harry's Roadhouse experience was (as it was billed) a "Holiday Jam"—loose, and a little rough around the edges. No matter what Bruce chooses to do for any future holiday shows, from his performance at Harry's, it's clear that his goal remains to fill them with fun, good music, and Christmas cheer. 🎅

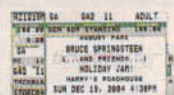
2004 Beneficiaries: Interfaith Neighbors, Hope Academy Charter School, Salvation Army, Family & Children's Services, Asbury Park Citizens on Patrol, Boys & Girls Club of Monmouth County, Ephiphany House, The Center, Prevention First, Hispanic Affairs & Resource Center, Save Tillie, Inc.

Harry's hallucination? Santa orders one more for the road (make it five for the snowman).



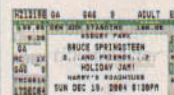
THE SETLISTS

*solo acoustic



Early (4:30):
Does This
Bus Stop
at 82nd

Street?/Wild Billy's Circus
Story*/This Hard Land*/Run
Rudolph Run/From Small Things
(Big Things One Day Come)/Two
Hearts/Rendezvous/Further On
(Up the Road)/Talk to Me/Spirit
in the Night/All That Heaven Will
Allow/Seaside Bar Song/Waitin' on
a Sunny Day/The Fever/Stand on
It/Darlington County/Bobby Jean/If
I Should Fall Behind*/Tenth Avenue
Freeze-out/Santa Claus is Comin'
to Town/(What's So Funny 'Bout)
Peace, Love and Understanding



Late (8:30):
For You*/
Working
on the

Highway*/This Hard Land*/Run
Rudolph Run/From Small Things
(Big Things One Day Come)/Two
Hearts/Rendezvous/Further On
(Up the Road)/Talk to Me/Spirit
in the Night/All That Heaven Will
Allow/Seaside Bar Song/It Takes
Two/Tell Him/Waitin' on a Sunny
Day/Stand on It/Merry Christmas,
Baby/Hava Nagila/Darlington
County/The Fever/If I Should Fall
Behind*/Tenth Avenue Freeze-out/
Santa Claus is Comin' to Town/
(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace,
Love and Understanding

THE PLAYERS

- ★ **Bobby Bandiera**
(Guitar, Vocals)
- ★ **Bob Burger** (Guitar, Vocals)
- ★ **Kevin Kavanaugh**
(Keyboards, Vocals)
- ★ **Joe Bellia** (Drums)
- ★ **Steve "Muddy Shews"**
Sewchuck (Bass)
- ★ **Chris Anderson** (Trumpet)
- ★ **Joey Stann** (Sax)
- ★ **Ed Manion** (Sax)

THE GUESTS

Early show:

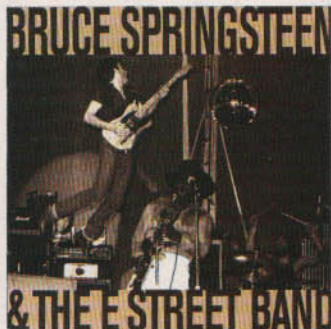
- ★ **Southside Johnny** (vocals, harmonica): "The Fever"

Late show:

- ★ **Max Weinberg** (drums): from "Seaside Bar Song" to the end
- ★ **Patti Scialfa** (vocals): "Spirit," "It Takes Two," "Tell Him," "Sunny Day," "Santa"
- ★ **Willie Nile** (vocals): "Santa"

ON COLLECT ING

By Fred Mills



Main Point Night

(Crystal Cat 2CD)

VENUE: The Main Point

CITY: Bryn Mawr, PA

DATE: February 2, 1975

SOUND QUALITY: 9.5

PERFORMANCE: 10

PACKAGING: 10

Chalk it up to the exhaustive Rising tour itinerary: word from the grapevine is that the bootleg world has finally reached a saturation point with regard to contemporary Springsteen releases. European labels are reportedly sitting on huge inventories of unsold product, and the Japanese don't even bother with Bruce titles anymore. ("Boss no longer boss," quipped one supplier.) Ever-mindful of the shifting demands of the marketplace, then, Crystal Cat opts to dig down into the vaults with this title and the simultaneously-issued *Agora Night*.

Main Point Night is, of course, the classic pre-*Born to Run* tour gig held as a benefit for the then-financially troubled Main Point club. The show was recorded and broadcast on tape delay over Philly's WMMR-FM, with legendary DJ Ed Sciaky presiding, and over the years it surfaced several times on vinyl (*You Can Trust Your Car to the Man Who Wears the Star* being the best-known title) although it wasn't until the CD era that the entire broadcast received a booting.

In 1991 Great Dane issued the complete 150-minute show as *The*

Backstreets does not endorse the illegal sale of bootleg recordings, nor can we advise as to their legality or how they may be obtained.

Saint, the Incident & the Main Point Shuffle, subsequently reissuing it a year or so later under the same name—but with significantly better, remastered sound—as part of the label's "Master Plus" series. This was then copied in '97 by Labour of Love, who decided to revive the old *You Can Trust Your Car...* title for its version. While at times bordering on flawless, the show always suffered from one annoying problem: after a spectacular 85 minutes or so there's a small but noticeable drop-off in sound quality (occurring at the 8:18 mark of "Kitty's Back"). This clearly suggests that two different tape sources were utilized, and no one has ever adequately explained why the second half of the show was taken from an inferior recording.

Now, the early word was that Crystal Cat had obtained a better, lower-generation tape, making all previous releases superfluous. Some retailers even went as far as to boast that the label was tapping the original radio station tapes. But sure enough, on *Main Point Night* the same sonic decline in "Kitty" occurs at the same point. So the advance hype was just that—hype. Regardless, MPN is still stunning. CC employed some deft remastering wizardry, achieving a hotter, more dynamically rich listening experience; the first half of the show is absolutely hiss- and distortion-free.

The performance itself is incendiary. Violinist Suki Lahav was in the E Street Band lineup at the time, and her contributions to both "Jungleland" and Dylan's "I Want You" make the music fairly glisten. As Bruce was fond of pulling chestnuts from the fire during this period, some other fun covers are present: early-rock oldies "Mountain of Love" and Chuck Berry's "Back in the U.S.A."—to our knowledge the only time the E Streeters ever performed it. What's been touted as the public premiere of "Thunder Road"—at the time bearing the provisional title "Wings for Wheels"—unfolded at the Main Point that night as well, and "She's the One" sounds equally fresh-scrubbed. A hilarious monologue (remember those?) prefaces a soulful rendition of "The E Street Shuffle." All in all, a must-hear show, particularly for folks wanting a snapshot of Springsteen just before

he would shift into *Born to Run* hyperdrive. Consider *Main Point Night* definitive.

Crystal Cat always excels at packaging, and this release is no exception. Included is a slick-stock, 12-page booklet loaded with period-specific photos (several of them apparently taken at the actual gig) plus a lengthy review. The photo in the rear tray panel is priceless, incidentally: the venue's employees had baked a two-tiered cake to thank the E Streeters, and if you look closely at the snapshot of the cake you'll spot a decorative red rose followed by the letters "ALITA."



Agora Night

(Crystal Cat 4CD)

VENUE: Agora Ballroom

CITY: Cleveland, OH

DATE: August 9, 1978

SOUND QUALITY: 10

PERFORMANCE: 10

PACKAGING: 9

Crystal Cat's other new archival excavation is even more impressive. One hot summer night in Cleveland, WMMS-FM sent out over the airwaves three hours' worth of primo Bruce. It was the broadcast that launched a thousand boots, both during the vinyl era (*The Teenage Werewolf*, *The Agora Show* parts 1 & 2, etc.) and after. The most well-known—and until now, definitive—CD version was the E St. label's three-disc *Summertime Bruce* issued in 1997 and, according to a notation in the booklet, taken from the actual radio station reels. As *Wanted* magazine once described it, "Excellent dynamics, a complete spectrum of highs and lows and no hiss... this is as close as a bootleg with unofficially released material can get to 'official' sound quality." Other labels soon served up their own copies of the E St. title, notably Super Sonic's *Agora 1978*, as the cleaned-up concert proved irresistible.

Once again, the rumor machine places Crystal Cat at

the original source. Whether the "master tapes" claim comes direct from the label or is simply wishful marketing on the part of bootleg retailers, a close A/B comparison between *Summertime Bruce* and *Agora Night* does offer some seemingly paradoxical testimony, that the two are at once identical yet different. Getting the source question out of the way, on both releases a telltale right-channel dropout, barely a second's worth, occurs about 16 seconds into "Gloria"/"She's the One." Sharp ears will no doubt be able to spot similar tiny glitches in other spots; this one is the most obvious giveaway.

Yet there's no question Crystal Cat's remastering job has improved upon E St.'s already stellar sound. With somewhat crisper high end and smoother/thicker low-end, plus more of that elusive quality known as "presence," *Agora Night* does qualify as a moderate upgrade, although it's impossible to say if a lower-generation source was actually used. (How does one go any lower than the "original" radio station tapes anyway?)

The CC release contains an intriguing non-musical marker that bears mentioning, however. At the start of the concert on disc one you hear the voice of WMMS-FM deejay Denny Sanders announcing the show to affiliates and listeners. Previous versions of the show, E St.'s included, did not feature the Sanders portion but opened instead with DJ Kid Leo's on-stage introduction of the band. (Sanders is also present at the beginning of CC's disc two, announcing the band's return to the stage following the set break.) So one could speculate that (a) CC did locate a different tape; or (b) CC used the same tape, and E St. simply deleted the Sanders portion when creating *Summertime Bruce*; or (c) the whole show was rebroadcast at a later date (unlikely, as Sanders is heard referring to "tonight's concert"). One can also get a very bad migraine fretting over such minutiae.

But wait, as the saying goes, there's more. Let me count the ways that Crystal Cat has loaded the dice. First off, there's the obligatory deluxe packaging: a 16-page booklet stuffed to the gills with live photos, poster

repros, and commentary, plus full-color double-sided tray panels.

Next, four bonus tracks, apparently soundboard recordings, turn up on disc three: "Incident on 57th Street" and "Tenth Avenue Freeze-out" (Palladium, NYC 9/16/78); "Kitty's Back" and "Point Blank" (Palladium, NYC 9/17/78)—the latter pair previously served as extras on *Summertime Bruce*. Also on disc three, following the end of the *Agora* concert proper, are station I.D.s recorded for WMMS by Bruce and Clarence (although they don't appear to be of '78 vintage, but from some later year).

Lastly, disc four is a 55-minute radio program originally aired as a *King Biscuit Flower Hour* and featuring a fairly interesting Bruce interview from that summer, conducted by DJ Dave Herman in San Diego, CA on July 9, 1978. The program also includes a portion of "Paradise by the C" and a complete "The Promised Land," both recorded a week prior live in Berkeley, CA. And as this fourth CD is a bonus item that isn't supposed to raise the set's selling price, Crystal Cat's offering an unprecedented value-for-money with *Agora Night*.

You'll notice I haven't given any discussion to the actual music. As if you need an incentive to pick up a broadcast from the *Darkness* tour—and certainly one that, in my opinion, just may rank as the best-sounding FM show from the era. Better than *Piece de Resistance*, better than *Winterland Night*, better than *Roxy Night*. Grab it and give it a listen—and then let the debates begin.

Live on the Darkness on the Edge of Town Tour

(Watchdog 2DVD)

VENUE: Capital Center

CITY: Landover, MD

DATE: August 15, 1978

SOUND QUALITY: 9

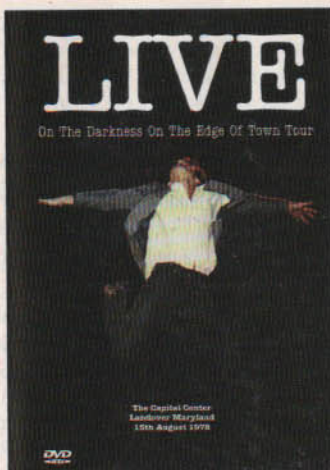
VIDEO QUALITY: 8.5

PERFORMANCE: 10

PACKAGING: 10

FEATURES: Bonus tracks from 1978; region-free NTSC format (playable on both North American and European DVD units); interactive top menus; individual song menus within each segment.

It's easy to forget, amid all the collector discussions about elaborately upgraded CD versions



of classic shows, that the world of Springsteen video is still at a point roughly comparable to rubbing two sticks together to create fire. Or is it? The artifact at hand offers compelling evidence otherwise. The *Darkness* tour stop at the Capital Center in Landover, Maryland (not Capitol Center, and not Largo, incidentally, as the show is sometimes mis-labeled) was notable for the fact that it was professionally filmed in color by the Center's in-house camera crew, with attendees then able to view the live action over the large closed-circuit TV screens suspended from the ceiling.

Nowadays, most top groups employ video to give fans added concert value, but in 1978 only a handful of venues offered the feature. Still, as the Landover video got traded and re-traded on VHS, its consumer appeal diminished in direct proportion to the degree of generation loss. With the advent of affordable home DVD technology, the quality slide was halted, but video collectors were still faced with retracing the Landover film's path in order to secure a low-generation copy that was actually worth the effort of remastering and transferring. That's exactly what happened with Watchdog's edition, a two-DVD affair (factory-pressed discs and not DVD-R) that, while not perfect, is as definitive as we'll likely see anytime soon.

Watchdog previously made a name for themselves with an excellent string of Dylan and Springsteen DVDs (among them, *Live on the River Tour*, *Tunnel of Love Express Tour 1988* and *Hot Fun in the Summertime*, all professionally filmed). But for this *Darkness* artifact, the label went above and beyond: first by locating what's

purported to be a second-generation video (most Landover shows in current circulation are, at best, third- or fourth-gen), then employing what one person in the know describes as "very upmarket equipment" to retouch and remaster the tape for the digital transfer from VHS to DVD.

"This stuff wasn't originally filmed to top professional standards," he continues, "so it's [still] murky in places, and the lighting isn't great in places either. And of course at the end of the day we're still coming from a VHS tape. So it's never going to look like an official release, and it's unrealistic to think it ever will. But people will still be shocked at how good this looks. I was staggered how much better it is compared to my 'pretty good' VHS tape which I've had for years."

He's right. While the above caveats are duly noted, and a couple of well-known problems inherent to the source tape do remain (there are edits at the one-hour and two-hour marks, so the ending of "Jungleland" is absent and the very start of "Rosalita" is clipped), the improvement is striking. Colors aren't as washed-out; the occasional "rolling lines" of TV interference are either gone or barely noticeable; segments that were irredeemably shadowy are noticeably crisper. And if you get past what can be charitably described as "inventive camera work" by the film crew—amateurish dissolves, jarring close-ups of spotlights, etc.—the viewing experience is nothing short of riveting. Note, too, that the audio portion was taken from a line feed directly off the soundboard rather than microphones, so the listening experience is equally rewarding.

The bonus material on the second disc is just as significant. Four professionally filmed songs from July 8, 1978 (Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Phoenix, AZ) have circulated in the past, with the version of "Rosalita" famously aired by the BBC turning up in slightly edited form

on the official *Video Anthology*. For this material Watchdog located a copy of the actual CBS/Teletronics promotional reel, one believed to be a single generation down from the BBC's tape; a timing strip running at the bottom of the screen is evidence of the tape coming from some TV station. Once again, high-end gear was used for the transfer, yielding near-flawless takes of "Rosalita" (unedited), "Prove It All Night," "Badlands" and "Born to Run."

In order to placate fans who are annoyed by timing strips, the label included a promo reel of the songs taken from an entirely different source, in slightly lesser quality but sans strips. "What [Watchdog] decided to do," *Backstreets* was told, "is give people the choice of both, because with some it's divided down the middle: 'Oh, this one's better.' 'Oh no, I don't like the [timing strip] text...'"

Incredibly, Watchdog also tracked down a fifth Phoenix song, one that has only circulated among the higher echelons of collectors. The slightly murky-looking "The Promised Land" is described as coming from yet another source and is "obviously a rough edit or a working tape, because it's never been on any of the official reels that have been sent out over the years."

Rounding out the second DVD are three pro-shot numbers from a Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes show at Cleveland's *Agora* on August 31, 1978. Bruce and Steve join their buddies for renditions of "The Fever," "I Don't Want to Go Home," and "Havin' a Party," all in outstanding audio and video. The artful 8-page booklet features quality photos plus a lengthy essay detailing the origins of the material and some of the detective work that went into the set's creation, and both discs are housed in a clear-plastic clamshell with a two-sided insert containing photos and track listings. Highly recommended. 🐕

MOVING?

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IN THE MID-1980s, FANS WERE excited to see a bootleg of a show a year after it ended. In the late-'80s, that wait was down to six months. In the early-'90s, it was three months. In the late-'90s and early-2000s, it was three weeks. In 2004, the waiting time was down to hours.

On the afternoon of October 2, 2004, a mere 14 hours or so after the last notes of "People Have the Power" ceased resonating through the Wachovia Center, Travis Bickle began uploading his recording of the October 1 show to alt.binaries.music.springs-teen (ABMS). While it wasn't a stellar recording, people all over the world could hear Bruce and Michael Stipe's duet on "Because the Night" the very next day. Bickle's Philly recording started a trend, as Cleveland, Minneapolis, and New Jersey all appeared on ABMS or the BitTorrent site EasyTree.org within days of each concert. Detroit and Orlando surfaced a couple of weeks later. Just like the end of the *Rising* tour, it wasn't a question of whether a recording of a show would surface, it was how good the recording would be. So let's follow the 2004 VFC tour through the magic of recorded media.

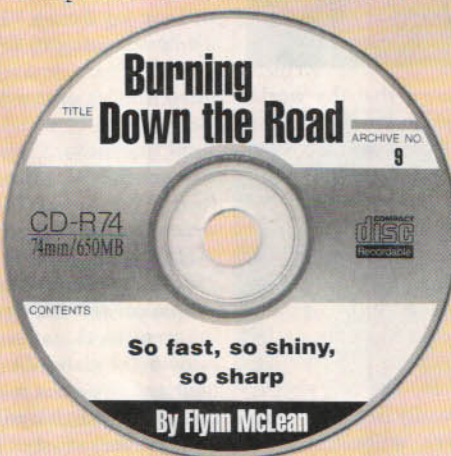
October 1, Philadelphia: Opening night of the Vote for Change tour produced two different recordings, neither of which were particularly amazing. The aforementioned Bickle recording was clear but distant; the Johnny B or JBCoffee version, which surfaced about a month later, was much closer but a tad muddier. This second version is definitely the better of the two. Two DVDs of this show, both utilizing the same tape from SmokeyBoyVids, have also circulated: one with menus and chapters, called *Vote for Change in Philadelphia*, and one without, called *Philadelphia VFC*.

October 2, Cleveland: No fewer than four different recordings of the Cleveland show have circulated: two different audience recordings and two different audience/wireless mixes. The two audience recordings were posted to ABMS and BitTorrent within days of the show, with the one posted to EasyTree.org being the (slightly) better of the two. The person who taped the show with the wireless equipment created a mix using his wireless recording and one of the audience recordings, the result relying more heavily on the wireless source. Then the talented folks of the Cincinnati Tapers Consortium (CTC) took another stab at a wireless/audience mix to use as the "soundtrack" for their DVD release of the show called *People Have the Power*. The PHTP soundtrack version features a more balanced mix between the audience and wireless recordings. It's likely the CTC crew wanted more audience in the audio for their DVD so that Bruce didn't sound like he was in the listener's ear while appearing further away from their eyes. Strangely, the straight wireless recording has not circulated as of press time.

The *People Have the Power* DVD itself is another strong release from the CTC. The DVD utilizes multiple cameras, including

one from behind the stage, and the aforementioned excellent audio, resulting in a very watchable experience. "Bonus clips" from Bruce's appearance with R.E.M. are also included, and for anyone who missed the pre-New Jersey dates, seeing and hearing Bruce and Michael Stipe together is a highlight of these recordings.

October 3, Detroit: The third show of the opening weekend produced an excellent audience recording, one that has been overlooked because of the strong Jersey and Cleveland tapes—despite the fact that it is as good if not better than the previous two. The recording is crisp and close, with minimal crowd noise.



October 5, St. Paul: The recording to come out of the St. Paul show, where Neil Young contributed some killer guitar, is clear but a tad distant. Still, it's an above-average recording, ripe for a strong remaster. In addition to the audio, the St. Paul show spawned an excellent DVD titled *Rockin' Ass in Minneapolis*, also from the CTC crew. This DVD was shot mostly from the screen and features audio dubbed from the above recording, but it is unfortunately incomplete, omitting the first two and last two songs of the show. However, it does include Bruce's two-song guest appearance from R.E.M.'s set as bonus tracks.

October 8, Orlando: It took a comparative eternity for a recording of the Orlando show to surface, so fans had to wait two whole weeks before they could relive the Florida stop of the tour. The only recording of the October 8 show to circulate thus far is very close, but suffers from a slight bit of distortion during the louder parts and rumbling on the low end. However, it is still quite listenable.

ScrewDevil put together a DVD of the Orlando show featuring three cameras: two trained on the stage, and one on the video screen. The camera work isn't as steady and consistent as the Cleveland release, however.

October 11, Washington, DC: Fans are certainly doing a great job of getting high-quality recordings, both audio and video, and of putting these releases together for the rest of the fan community, truly outdoing themselves with each one. But these releases are

still amateur in nature, and nothing brought that point home like the Sundance broadcast of the October 11 tour "finale." After viewing so many fan-created titles, the professionally filmed broadcast was jarring for its clarity and camera work. The broadcast-sourced DVD—still a fan effort, just to be clear, not available as an official release—is a must-have. Yes, Bruce's set was shorter than at other stops on the tour, but the quality more than makes up for it. And, of course, some of us just have shorter attention spans.

October 13, New Jersey: The honor of best audio recording (and possibly best show) of the Vote for Change tour goes to the tour finale at the Continental Airlines Arena in New Jersey—a very nice, crisp, clear recording with minimal audience noise. The stellar set list with the extra special guests (Eddie Vedder and Jackson Browne) combined with the amazing performance makes this one a must-have. This excellent recording only features Bruce's set, but another taper did capture the earlier performances from Jackson Browne and Patti Scialfa. Little Steven's guest performance on "I Am a Patriot" with Browne was almost more exciting for some fans than Springsteen's guest spots with each opening act (two songs with his better half, and "Running on Empty" with Browne). Fortunately, this second recording is more than listenable, with "clear but distant" again being an accurate description, but with some distracting chatting near the taper.

DVD producer extraordinaire ScrewDevil applied his skills to the Jersey show as well, producing an excellent DVD titled *He's the Boss, I'm the Employee*. The fully-authored DVD incorporates menus and chapters; the tapers, utilizing multiple cameras, mostly stay with long shots, using screenshots sparingly and zooming in at appropriate times. Bonus tracks add Bruce's guest spots in the earlier sets, plus Steven and Jackson on "I Am a Patriot." The audio is dubbed from the excellent audience recording.

PRIOR TO THE VOTE FOR CHANGE tour, Bruce joined Patti at three of her late September 2004 shows; only one, the September 21 show at the Bowery Ballroom in New York, has produced a recording. The recording sounds surprisingly good, though the between-song banter from Patti is a little hard to hear.

The Stone Pony London message board continues with their live series (www.stoneponylondon.net/live-collection), this time taking on the twin 1992 releases of *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*. Since the point of the series is to capture definitive and/or great-sounding versions of each song, most of the sources should be familiar to collectors. Some, however, are not—particularly the selection of "Lucky Town" from April 2000 instead of the 1992-'93 tour. Both sets feature bonus tracks, with the *Human Touch* set utilizing a second, three-track disc of additional

Continued next page

CLASSIFIEDS

PERSONALS

TO JEAN AND BILL: YOUR FRIENDSHIP MEANS SO much. Thanks for everything. "No retreat, baby, no surrender." Love, Dana

SUMMER'S GONE AND THE TIME IS STILL RIGHT for racin' in the street. Maybe we can meet in Clifton-town. —Rappin'

LIZABETH— YOU'VE TOUCHED MY HEART AND soul like no one ever has. I can't wait for you to come home, so we can start our life together. Then you will be mine forever.... —Vinny

SPECIAL GREETINGS TO GEORGE SOUTH WITH my thanks for all the laughs and the Mid-Atlantic love on the road. And for always finding the hidden Bruce treasure and your messages within! No surrender, my brother.

SPRINGSTEEN FANS REACH OUT: TSUNAMI RELIEF still needed. Make a difference, find out how at www.usafreedomcorps.gov.

WANTED

LOOKING FOR PHOTOS FROM THE PRE-CONCERT cocktail party with Bruce at St. Rose on Nov 8, 1996. E-mail me at jesken1215@aol.com.

IN SEARCH OF PHOTOS OF BRUCE WITH ROBBIN Thompson, onstage in Richmond, 3/6/03. Any help? E-mail editor@backstreets.com.

SEEKING BRUCE FANS IN FRANCE TO HELP THE Springsteen Special Collection. Many French books, magazines, and fanzines are already in the Springsteen Special Collection of books and magazines at the Asbury Park Public Library, but we still need many others, including issues of Best, Best Nouvelle, Foto Music, Guitar & Claxier, Guitare, Photo, Rock & Folk, Wow, and the fanzine Pink Cadillac. See our complete holdings and want lists at www.asburyparklibrary.org/bruce.htm and contact us at pbjcrane@erols.com for information on donating.

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performances of some of the songs. Two very cool sets, especially for fans of that material.

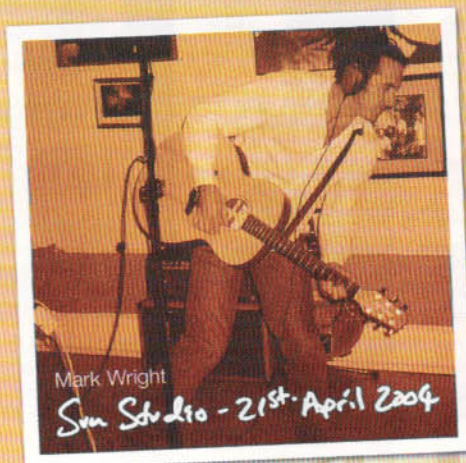
A newly surfaced recording of the January 23, 1981 show in Montreal ranks high among audience tapes from the River tour (although not as good as August 4 or August 20, 1981). Unfortunately, the recording is incomplete, ending after "You Can Look" early in the second set. Another song, "The Promised Land," is also missing from the first set. But what is included is way above average for the era, and one could easily combine it with the second-half soundboard recording from the Toronto show three days earlier to make for a very satisfying listening experience.

Speaking of combining: that newly discovered Montreal audio goes right along with a just-surfaced video recording of the same show. Video of the entire show had circulated previously (under the title *Montreal '81*), but generation loss made it difficult to watch. BruceVideos has combined the new video and

new audio to create their *Half of the Show* DVD. Unfortunately, the upgraded video footage only exists for the first set, so the DVD reverts back to the original video footage in order to accompany the improved audio through "You Can Look." So what we've got is half of a 1981 show, sourced from a low generation tape and dubbed with an excellent audio recording. While even the new video pales in comparison to the standards of today, this is a unique viewing experience considering the rarity of River tour footage.

The nearly infamous wireless recording of the April 26, 2000, Pittsburgh show—which some fans refer to as "Garry Tallent and the E Street Band," as the bass was so prominent in the mix—has finally been mixed with an audience recording and circulated under the title *From the Monongahela Valley*. The mix was done by the same person who did the 10/21/99 mix (*The Ghost of Tom Joad*), who did an admirable job here of reducing the bass without making the recording sound thin. ➔

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Continued from page 9

cal atmosphere of recent weeks and the vociferous debate about Springsteen's participation in the Kerry campaign, such a confrontation seemed almost inevitable. Fortunately, though there was a tense moment or two, few on stage seemed to notice anything amiss.

During Grushecky's set, the lineup of Houserockers was augmented by hardworking event co-organizer Tony "Boccigalupe" Amato, whose outstanding organ work graced many a set throughout the weekend. The night's festivities eventually devolved into a typically shambolic jam, as assorted musicians packed the stage and traded vocals, including JoBonanno, Danny White, and Willie Nile. Always deferential to fellow Jersey Shore artists, Springsteen hung back at the end, becoming just another guitar onstage. A raucous rendition of the Isley Brothers' "Shout" more or less ended the evening, and at 2:30 a.m., exhausted audience members and performers departed into the night.

Turning in strong performances on Friday were Jesse Malin and former Smithereen Pat Dinizio, and on Saturday, a rousing set by Willie Nile was unfortunately overshadowed by the fireworks that followed. Throughout the weekend, audiences were treated to consistently fine acoustic work on the outdoor patio by a variety of regional artists including Lanky, Nicole Atkins, Rob Dye, and Mimi Cross. Ironically, the sparsely attended Sunday lineup provided some of the best music of the weekend: the crystalline vocal harmonies of the Pierces, Bruce Tunkel's mind-blowing set with the always fine Maybe Pete, and the quietly intense Shane Fontayne.

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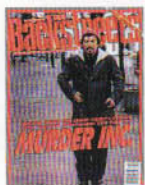
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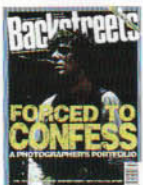
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